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**THE PRINCIPLES  
OF  
INTERIOR DECORATION**





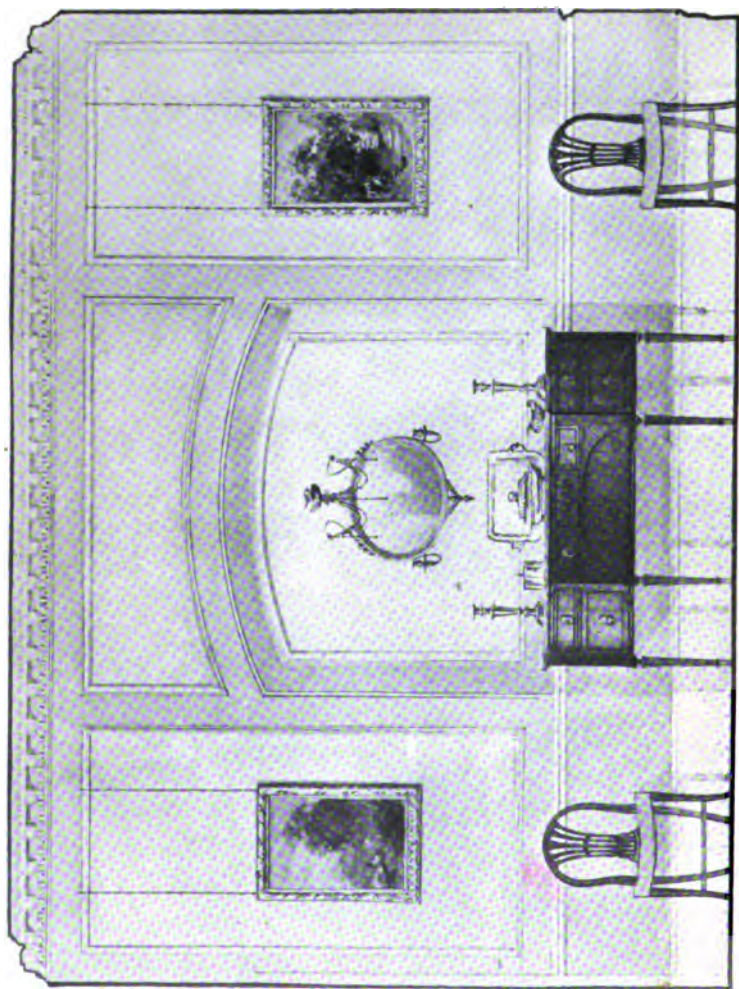
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# TO VIEW ANTHOLOGY



*Courtesy of Gill & Reigate Ltd., London.*

PLATE I.—This sidewall illustrates simply but admirably many of the principles of decorative composition. It should be studied in connection with the chapters on The Elements of Beauty, Contrast, Proportion, and Balance.

**THE PRINCIPLES  
OF  
INTERIOR DECORATION.**

UNIV. OF  
CALIFORNIA

BY

*b.c.*

**BERNARD C. JAKWAY**

UNIVERSITY EXTENSION LECTURER IN INTERIOR  
DECORATION, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The nature and the purpose of this study are, I believe, accurately indicated by its title. It is an attempt to analyze, correlate and set forth as clearly as possible the artistic principles that underlie sound work in the decoration of houses. This attempt is based upon the conviction that in a knowledge of these principles, their scientific basis, and the methods of their application, the beginner in this art will find the surest and easiest path to reasonably successful results in practice.

The book is designed primarily to be of interest to the housewife, concerned with the attractiveness of her home; to the worker in housefurnishing shops, concerned with increasing the value of his services; to the teacher, concerned with imparting compact and workable knowledge, and to the reader who desires a general understanding of the subject. In other words, it is designed to be of interest primarily to the beginner and the reader whose knowledge of interior decoration is limited, rather than to the artist and the expert.

The artist, precisely because he is an artist, has reached a point where he works intuitively, without conscious reference to the scientific substratum which necessarily underlies all his creative processes. He gets the results at which he aims, and need not trouble with reasons. The beginner, however, possesses little or none of this power. He cannot with safety depend

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wholly or even largely upon intuition, as multitudes of unlovely houses abundantly witness. His choices must be reasoned choices, based upon conscious reference to the principles of decorative composition involved in his problem. His only alternative is the method of simple experiment—a method enormously wasteful, in time, in money, in comfort, and especially in beauty.

There have been many attempts to formulate the principles of interior decoration, and there will no doubt be many more. The final work on any art can never be written, since artistic theory does not precede the practice of creative artists, but follows after. Of the present book I can say truthfully only that it represents a great amount of hard work, now finished. With a profound sense of relief I pass the work of judgment on to the reader.

The ideas herein set forth have been drawn from manifold and widely scattered sources. Many of them have of course been taken from the common stock-pot of professional practice. A few, I believe, are my own. For the most part, however, they have of necessity resulted, either directly or through processes of synthesis, from the reading of other men's works. Most of this reading, extending through many years and covering many fields, has been done without a notebook. At this late day it is unhappily impossible to trace and credit these ideas to their original sources. All that I can do now is to make a general acknowledgment of indebtedness, particularly to the works of Ruskin and Walter Crane; to the *Grammaire des arts décoratifs* and the *Grammaire historique des arts du dessin* of Ch. Blanc; to Mayeux's *La composition*

*décorative*; Harvard's *L'art dans la maison*; Croce's Theory of *Æsthetic*; Lipps' *Raumästhetik und geometrisch-optische Täuschungen*; Souriau's *L'esthétique de la lumière*; Raymond's series of volumes on comparative esthetics; Valentine's Introduction to the Experimental Psychology of Beauty; Féré's Pathology of Emotions, and to Chevreul, Rood, Von Bezold, Ridgeway and Luckiesh among the colorists.

Grateful acknowledgment is due to Mr. William Cusick of San Francisco, who twice read the manuscript during the formative stages of its preparation, and to Mr. Gregg O'Brien, who made most of the drawings essential to a clear understanding of the text.

The method of illustration is unusual in books on interior decoration, and merits a word of explanation. While the suggestive value of photographic reproductions of good interiors is very great, so that the student will want to be familiar with the large number of such interiors to be found in the books and magazines of every library, for the purposes of this study the amount of detail in illustrations of this character renders them of questionable value. They include too much and teach too little. Being here concerned with the illustration of specific principles as they are separately considered, I have employed for the purpose line drawings and simple photographs, each emphasizing the point involved—often to the degree of intentional over-emphasis—and no other. The drawings are inserted in the body of the text, thus linking indissolubly the discussion and illustration of each point. By this method the pictorial value of the book may perhaps be



lessened. I feel sure, however, that its real usefulness to the reader will be very greatly increased.

I was in London at the time the manuscript was completed, and the photographs reproduced are for that reason largely from English sources. They were for the most part made available through the courtesy of Messrs. Gill & Reigate, Ltd., Messrs. Arthur Sanderson & Sons, Ltd., the National Gallery and the British Museum. It is a pleasure to acknowledge my appreciation of these courtesies.

BERNARD C. JAKWAY.

Berkeley,  
California.

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**THE PRINCIPLES  
OF  
INTERIOR DECORATION**



# THE PRINCIPLES OF INTERIOR DECORATION

## CHAPTER I

### THE NATURE AND METHOD OF THE ART

**W**E all live in houses of one sort or another. Before these houses can be lived in they must be furnished. When furnished, whether well or ill, they constitute the environment in which we spend the great part of our lives, and as such influence us continuously and profoundly. In the degree that this environment is beautiful and comfortable it affects us favorably, making for repose, for quick recuperation from fatigue of mind or body, for cheerfulness, for wider and higher interests, and for a fuller and comelier mode of living generally. In the degree that it is uncomfortable and unbeautiful it makes quite as inevitably for the opposites of these desiderata.

It is therefore evident that a properly furnished house is, for each of us, a very important matter indeed; and, as a necessary corollary, that a knowledge of how to furnish a house properly is also a very important matter. Unhappily no one is born with this knowledge.

## *The Principles of Interior Decoration*

It must be acquired, at some cost in time and effort, before it can be employed. Beauty and comfort in the home—and equally, of course, in the hotel, theater, or public room of whatever kind—do not result from chance or happy accident. They result from the proper employment of reasoned processes. That is, they result only from the practice of an art, using the word art to mean practice as guided by correct principles in the use of means for the attainment of a desired end. This art, for lack of a better term, we call interior decoration. Those who study and practice this art, whether as professionals or laymen, are here called decorators.

In a fine sense interior decoration is one of the creative arts. Transforming an empty house into a place of restful beauty is no less creative work than transforming a stretcher of white canvas into a picture, or a block of stone into a sculptured form. There is, however, this very important distinction: that while the decorator creates an artistic whole he does not create the individual units by means of which that whole is built up. That is, he does not design and weave his own rugs, or print his own wall papers or cretonnes, or build his own tables or chairs. What he does is to select such things as he may require from stocks designed and made by others, and to combine and arrange the things so selected in such a way as to fashion a harmonious and beautiful whole. Interior decoration therefore is in an emphatic and peculiar sense an art of selection and arrangement.

It is obvious that such an art does not require

## *The Nature and Method of the Art*

dexterity of hand or skill in craftsmanship for its successful practice, but rather skill in selection and arrangement. / Work of the highest order demands, here as in the other arts, that power of imagination and of vast artistic synthesis which we call genius. Work of a lower order demands, at the least, an unerring sense of what is becoming and appropriate, a clear perception of what is harmonious and beautiful in the relationships of form and color, and a considerable familiarity with decorative materials and processes. In a word, it demands precisely that complex of knowledge, appreciation, discrimination and judgment connoted by the word taste.

Taste, which Chenier happily characterized as a delicate good sense, is defined by the dictionary as the power of perceiving and relishing excellence in human performances; the faculty of discerning beauty, order, congruity, proportion, symmetry, or whatever constitutes excellence. The definition is inadequate, as the definition of any complex abstraction is sure to be; but the faculty itself constitutes the irreducible minimum in the equipment of the decorator. Lacking taste, no one can hope to do anything worth while in the art. Possessing it, any one can hope to do much, however meager his other resources. For the decorator the acquisition of a sure taste is therefore in the most determined sense a necessity.

There is, of course, no royal road. The distance to be traveled, as well as the difficulties of the journey, will vary for each individual. At the worst, we know that taste is a faculty which can be cultivated by any

## *The Principles of Interior Decoration*

normal person who is willing to make the necessary effort. It is indubitable that different persons are differently endowed, and that the acquisition of a cultivated taste will prove more difficult for one than for another; but it is also true that the mind and the spirit, like the body, can be strengthened by exercise, and that for the person of normal endowment there need be no question of possibility, but only of means and methods.

The word taste is very commonly used in a second sense, to express individual fancy or predilection. This significance of the term is, in fact, the only one recognized by a great many people, with a resulting confusion of ideas which is responsible for much bad decoration. The saying that there is no disputing in matters of taste has come down to us from antiquity, and even to-day it is true that great numbers of housewives do not admit the need for a cultivated taste because they do not recognize the authority, or indeed the existence, of any norms or standards of artistic judgment higher than their own preferences. Quite naturally the more unsophisticated among housewives of this class proceed to furnish their homes according to the promptings of their own sweet will, and remain happily unperturbed by the result. Among the more sophisticated we find on the one hand a tendency to imitate—to copy from the homes of acquaintances or from books and magazines, or, under the name of period decoration, to set up in their homes, with scrupulous fidelity to detail, one or more of the historic styles. On the other hand, there is a disposition to reject experience; to aim only at self-expression; and,

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mistaking mere eccentricity for originality, to create decorative environments which reveal neither beauty nor comfort, but only the vagaries of inept and undisciplined fancy.

It is clear that the real aim of interior decoration is as remote from mere imitation as it is from mere eccentricity; being, as we have seen, no other than the creation of a beautiful and fitting home. In these creative processes it can work neither blindly nor by fiat. Rather it must, like every other creative art, work in harmony with a body of definable general principles, and its products, whether imitative or original, can be excellent only in the degree that they conform to these principles. It follows therefore that taste, in so far as it governs the selective processes of the art, can be best and most quickly cultivated by the study of these underlying principles, and by the critical and long-continued examination of such examples of good and bad work as are necessary to their illustration and mastery. To deny that interior decoration has a basis in organized knowledge is to deny the possibility of intelligent progress in the art. Writing of the art of painting, Leonardo da Vinci long ago observed that "those who become enamored of the practice of the art without having previously applied themselves to the diligent study of the scientific part of it may be compared to mariners who put to sea without rudder or compass, and therefore cannot be certain of arriving at the wished-for port. Practice must always be founded on good theory." What is true of painting is even more true of interior decoration. It, too, consists in a



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superstructure of practice resting upon a substructure of principle, and any genuinely productive study of it must begin with its foundation.

Interior decoration is a part of the whole body of architecture, an art which differs from painting, sculpture, music and poetry in that it has a practical aim. While the other arts have always served primarily to give expression to man's artistic impulses and to satisfy his esthetic needs, architecture, at first devoted to the erection of his tombs and temples, was soon made to minister directly to his comfort by providing him with habitations. And since it is the first business of a habitation to be habitable, architecture has always had to take due account not only of the esthetic factors which are the sole concern of the other arts, but also of the constantly varying factors of individual needs and preferences. For this reason, while sculpture has changed but little since the time of Greece, and painting has not changed greatly since the Renaissance, architecture has changed continually, both in methods and ideals, in the effort to adapt itself measurably to varying climatic conditions and building materials, and to changing social organization and racial, family and individual needs.

Herein lies the justification and the point of departure for the separate study of the art of decoration, which is concerned, far more intimately than is architecture proper, with the satisfaction of special needs and the expression of personal tastes and aspirations. In construction a house must conform, in a considerable measure at least, to the prevailing taste and to available

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building materials. In the choice and arrangement of its furniture and applied decoration no such necessity exists, and individual needs and preferences are rightly to be regarded as matters of primary importance. Thus interior decoration is peculiarly a practical art. Its actual problems are all individual problems, since each involves the adaptation of decorative objects, materials, processes and ideals to particular needs, and to the requirements of a particular house.

The extraordinary interest in housefurnishing everywhere manifest to-day is a phenomenon of recent and rapid growth. Forty years ago the American people had slight conception of the cultural importance of the home environment, and cared relatively little about the way in which their houses were furnished. Public taste, which became debased here as in Europe after the close of the Napoleonic wars, was still at the ebb. Beauty itself, in any form, was regarded with suspicion, as submersive of morality, by a considerable number of our people, and with indifference by a vastly larger number. Even among the wealthy and traveled classes there were few well-furnished houses. In fact, it was an acquaintance with the homes of our wealthy and traveled classes that moved Oscar Wilde, who visited New York at about that time, to characterize American houses—with more truth than tact—as “ilily designed, decorated shabbily and in bad taste, and filled with furniture not honestly made and out of character.”

While it is possible that we could hardly expect to escape a trial if the same indictment were brought

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against us to-day, we could certainly make out a far better case for the defense. During the last three decades American life has been dominated by a deep-rooted universal determination to make that life more worth the living. This purpose has inspired and vivified every phase of national thought and activity, advancing education, altering old ideals in business and in society, shortening the hours and improving the conditions of labor, driving the boss and the machine out of the business of government, softening harsh creeds and emphasizing the ideals of brotherhood and service.

In nothing has the effect of this determination to make life saner and richer been more marked than in our changing attitude toward our homes and toward the home-making processes. And this growing desire for fitting and beautiful homes for their own sake has been intensified by modern science, which has taught us to see that our own well-being and the well-being of our children is conditioned by the factor of home environment as inevitably as the well-being of the flowers in our gardens is conditioned by the physical factors of sun and soil and rain.

For these reasons the past fifteen years have witnessed what we may well call a revolutionary change. No woman of intelligence is now indifferent to the beauty or the ugliness of her home. The economic, cultural and social importance of the art of interior decoration is widely and clearly recognized. And while it is unhappily true that multitudes of houses still exist which no sane man could call either beautiful or comfortable,

## *The Nature and Method of the Art*

their existence is for the most part due to ignorance or lack of skill rather than to indifference. Whatever we actually have, we all want attractive homes, and we therefore want to know how to create them.

## CHAPTER II

### FITNESS TO PURPOSE

**O**NE who sets out to furnish a given house for the occupancy of a given family faces a three-fold problem. He must select and arrange in the house such things as suit the age, sex and temperament of the individual members, meet their needs, express their tastes and aspirations, and fit their purse. He must, moreover, see that the things so selected and arranged suit the house itself, in scale, coloring and style. Finally, he must see to it that these things are not only suitable but intrinsically good-looking, and that they combine to form a harmonious and beautiful whole.

In other words, the treatment of every house, and of each room in every house, involves the interplay of three factors, which we may differentiate as the personal, the architectural and the esthetic. No decorative problem, however simple or complex, can be solved rightly unless each of these factors is rightly considered and given its due importance in the final result.

It is imperative to get this point clearly fixed at the outset, since it is basic. The decorator is in practice by no means a free agent. Rather he is rigorously limited in his choices by the requirements of suitability

## *Fitness to Purpose*

or fitness. Thus among the illimitable number of possible choices he is first of all limited to those things which are intrinsically good-looking, or beautiful. Among the wide range of possible choices that remain after this first process of elimination, he is again limited to such things as adequately meet the peculiar needs of a particular group. Among the somewhat narrow range of possible choices remaining after this second process of elimination he is again strictly limited to such things as fit the architectural requirements of a particular building and room. The actual range of choice is illustrated graphically in Figure 1. Here the circle A represents the total of good-looking things, B the total of things that would fit the requirements of the family, and C the total that would fit the house. It is clear that only such things as lie within the small area D, where the three circles intersect, can be of direct interest to the decorator, and that his choices, when he begins the work of decorative composition, must, whatever his personal fancies and predilections, be strictly confined to this area.

All unfitting decoration, of whatever kind, is vanity and vexation of spirit. It involves the loss of comfort, the sacrifice of beauty, the waste of money. Occasionally, of course, it must result from lack of means; but far more often it results from lack of taste, of energy, and of simple common sense. That large means are essential to the creation of comfortable and beautiful rooms, and that such rooms are certain to result when large means are employed, is a widespread notion whose unsoundness is exposed by multitudes of houses.

## *The Principles of Interior Decoration*

In point of fact, any one can furnish a home fitly and even beautifully with relatively inexpensive materials; provided only that he have the taste to recognize fit-

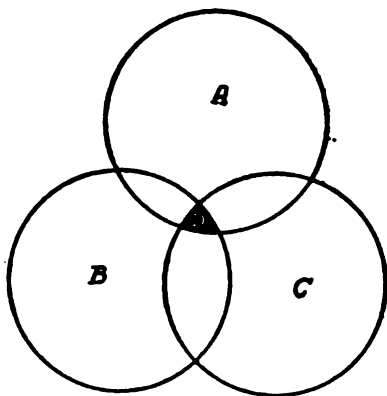


FIGURE 1.—Of the three intersecting circles, A represents the total number of things available which, without reference to their suitability, are intrinsically good-looking; B the total number capable of satisfying the personal requirements; C the total number capable of satisfying the architectural requirements; D the total capable of satisfying all the conditions, and to which the choices of the decorator must accordingly be limited.

ness and beauty in materials, the energy and patience to search out the right things, and the imaginative power necessary to combine them in harmonious wholes. ✓

In setting about the decoration of a given house the architectural factor is properly the first to be considered, since the size and other physical characteristics of the rooms will of necessity largely condition the size, ornamental detail and coloring of the things that go into them.

The personal factor is, however, properly first in importance. A house is not, like a hotel, a temporary resting-place for all the world and his wife. It is a permanent dwelling-place for a particular group of individuals. Hence no decorative treatment, however admirably it may deal with

## *Fitness to Purpose*

the architectural and esthetic factors involved, can be considered good unless it makes adequate provision for the satisfaction of the individual and family needs, preferences and limitations of this particular group.

This is a matter of simple common sense; yet it is continually ignored both by professional decorators and by laymen. The professional, by virtue of his training, thinks first of the architectural and esthetic factors. He is rarely on terms of sufficient intimacy with his clients to be able to estimate accurately the personal considerations involved. Moreover, being human, he is likely to assume the professional's attitude of good-natured contempt for the layman's opinion in his own field, and to regard the decoration of a particular house or room as wholly a matter of creating a harmonious and beautiful interior, even though the process may involve a very considerable disregard of the real needs and preferences of his clients.

The layman, and particularly the housewife, very often reveals a more or less complete disregard for the personal factor. Sometimes this is due to failure to remember that the furnished room is, after all, simply background for the people who live in it; often to unwillingness to make the very real and sometimes prolonged effort necessary to the perfect adaptation of furnishings to individual needs; usually, perhaps, to a desire to follow what is conceived to be the fashion.

We are all governed largely in our choices by the instinct of imitation. This instinct, which impels us to dress in the mode and to read the best sellers, impels



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us also to copy the latest mode in the decoration of our homes. But while this very natural desire to be *au fait* in all things results in much business for the dealer in decorative materials, as it does for the milliner and the modiste, it results also in much bad, because unfitting, decoration. Many housewives reveal an amusing eagerness to have their rooms done in the latest, rather than in the most fitting, manner—an eagerness based upon the widely-held but quite erroneous idea that there must necessarily be frequent and abrupt changes of fashion in house-furnishing as in dress, and that the latest mode must be the most desirable. This notion is peculiarly difficult to combat in our own day, when architecture and decoration are purely eclectic, and in our own land, where both the machinery of production and distribution and the absence of traditional models and of accepted standards of taste tend to emphasize the incidental and transient rather than the essential and permanent aspects of the house-furnishing art.

The decorator must, however, never forget that he who chooses to disregard the personal factor, or even to make it of subordinate importance, must pay in loss of comfort and of beauty. One whose chief concern is to work in the craze of the hour may experience an hour's satisfaction; but he will assuredly fail in achieving the dignity, the individuality and the fine flavor of distinction to be found only in homes whose decorative treatments are based throughout upon the studied needs and tastes of their occupants.

Making the furnishings fit the house is second in

## *Fitness to Purpose*

importance only to making them fit the people who live in it, and the decorator must in every instance consider the house to be done quite as carefully as he considers its occupants. He will, first of all, study the house as a whole—its general plan, its details, its style. Later he will take up in turn each individual room, observing its size and proportions, its woodwork and floor, the number, shape and location of its openings, its relation to connecting rooms, to the view outside, and to the morning and afternoon sun. Only when he is in possession of complete and accurate information can he undertake the business of choosing and combining furnishings with any assurance of success.

The bearing of these personal and architectural considerations upon the actual processes of decorative composition will be developed in later chapters. They are mentioned here simply to drive home the fact that from every point of view fitness to purpose is a principle of dominant importance in the art. Good decoration is not absolute, but relative, being essentially a matter of correct relationships. A house can be considered to be properly furnished only when it meets all the real needs, both practical and esthetic, of all its occupants. A decorative idea or material or process or object is good only when, in a given situation, it fits its purpose. Otherwise it is bad. Fitness to purpose, as a principle of selection, is at the beginning of interior decoration, and is in fact as fundamental to the processes of that art as the proposition that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points is fundamental to the processes of geometry.

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Any creative work must start with an idea. Before we can do anything we must clearly understand what we desire to do. This fact must be accepted unreservedly by the decorator. He must not be so naïve as to suppose that vague ideals and hazy, undefined enthusiasms for beauty, fitness and distinction will get him anywhere in his art. Its effects are not produced by magic or incantation, but by definite relationships of form and color, no more mysterious than the relationships of words in sentences, and equally dependent for expression upon definite ideas. Rooms do not grow in repose or beauty or dignity. They must be invested with these attributes by studied creative processes. These processes, as we shall see, are not difficult to understand; but they can be successfully employed only by one who knows precisely what he is trying to do.

The first thing to be definitely determined is the purpose of each room—not the name by which it is to be designated, but the actual function it is to perform in the life of the household. It is reasonable to assume that the rooms of any house will be devoted to such special purposes as best satisfy the real needs and tastes of its occupants, and that accordingly the choice between a library, drawing room or music room, for example, or between a sewing room, den, or additional guest room, will be determined by considerations of fitness. Yet while this sounds too elementary to need reciting, it is a matter of common observation that many women are more strongly influenced in this matter by the conventions of their neighborhood,

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coterie or class than by real needs or aspirations. Thus homes are equipped with libraries in which no one ever reads, with drawing rooms used but once in a blue moon, with breakfast rooms that never get the morning sun; and thus time and money are squandered, and precious space is worse than wasted.

Once the real purpose of a room has been determined, everything used in furnishing it should be chosen and arranged to concur in expressing that purpose. Thus the hall, which in the modern house is primarily a means of access to the other rooms, should have an atmosphere of welcome and good cheer, tempered, however, by dignity and restraint. We receive the stranger at our door with cordiality, but do not immediately admit him to the intimacies of family life, and the hall should be made to express this distinction. Its atmosphere of cheer and welcome can be insured by warm and cheerful coloring; its effect of dignity and restraint by the employment of few pieces of furniture, and these of a somewhat formal type, placed in carefully balanced relation to the room. Tall chairs and cabinets and long, narrow wall tables ordinarily best accord with the proportions of the hall, while richly colored textiles relieve and set off by contrast its bare spaces. Pictures, marquetry, and small objects which require, for clear perception and full enjoyment, wide spaces or a definite effort of attention, have as a rule no place in the hall, since the room is one in which but little time is spent.

Similarly, the living room, as the room in which all the members of the family meet for rest, reading or

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conversation, and in which they spend a great part of their time, must have as its first and absolutely essential quality an atmosphere of spaciousness and repose. This can be ensured through the use of a relatively low-toned and neutral coloring, background surfaces free from any hint of garishness, substantial and inviting chairs, long and low sofas, cabinets and tables, and adequate but properly shaded lights, and by limiting the very small or trivial and fussy accessories to a number incapable of destroying the serenity of the room. Such a room should never be overcrowded; nor can small, bright-colored rugs, delicate upholstery fabrics or fragile-looking furniture have any place in it, because these things cannot be made to concur in an effect of spaciousness and repose.

Like considerations of fitness to situation and use apply of course to the decoration of every other room. The things which enter into the treatment of a dining room should concur in making it a comfortable, restful, and yet a stimulating place in which to eat. Nothing can fitly find a place in a bedroom which tends to destroy its essential function as a place in which to rest and sleep.

Obviously these vague generalities are of slight value to the student. They will be restated more definitely and more scientifically in subsequent chapters. They are introduced here by way of reemphasizing the fact that fitness to purpose conditions the choice of all the furnishings of the room, as it conditions the choice of purpose of the room, and that comfort and beauty will remain forever strangers to a room in which this

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basic principle of all good work has failed of application.

The decorative materials, like other good things of this world, must be paid for. Accordingly, their cost must in every instance be determined by considerations of fitness. But while it is obvious that a house may properly be furnished either sumptuously or inexpensively, according to the character of the house itself and to the means and tastes of its occupants, it seems to be less obvious to the layman that it ought in either case to be furnished to a carefully graduated scale. In decoration it is unwise for artistic no less than for practical reasons to put all one's eggs into one basket. It is a serious mistake to mix the costly with the cheap, since both are thereby spoiled. Consistent adherence to a predetermined standard of excellence throughout the appointments of each room, and to standards not markedly different in connecting rooms, is absolutely essential to good work. The decorator must accordingly be on guard against the easy possibility of disturbing the decorative balance of a room by the use of single objects or materials too costly for the other furnishings, or of destroying the decorative consistency and *air de famille* of a suite of connecting rooms by making any one of them, whatever its character, too fine for the others.

All these considerations point to the need of a studied plan of procedure. As a matter of fact, a consistent plan, based upon a careful study of the rooms to be furnished and the needs, tastes and means of their occupants, is only less essential to good work

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in furnishing a house than in building it. While the proper scope of such a plan will become more clear as we proceed with this study, it is evident at the outset that any plan ought to include a color scheme for each room, based upon a careful consideration of both the architectural and personal factors involved, and a list of all the important articles required for each room, as determined by the purpose and size of the room and the needs of those who use it. With this list the decorator will prepare a schedule of prices which will show the approximate cost of furnishing each room, and, by addition, the total cost of all the rooms. If this grand total proves to be too high for the available appropriation, the whole treatment, or at any rate the treatment of connecting rooms, must be revised and scaled down in order to preserve the effect of consistency which is an invariable characteristic of good work in decoration as in all the arts.

Fitness to purpose has a negative as well as a positive side, since it is quite as necessary to leave out the non-essential as it is to include the essential. Because of the increasingly clear perception of this fact, simplicity has become one of the watchwords of present-day practice. Properly used, the term means freedom from complexity; from too many parts; from artificial and pretentious style. It does not mean mere bareness or crudity or entire absence of ornament or entire innocence of style. There is no esoteric or peculiar virtue in calcimined walls, ingrain or oatmeal papers, scrim, burlap, extra weight denim, rag rugs or mission furniture, though each of these materials may be excellent

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in its proper situation. A room may be clothed with glowing colors and filled with sumptuous fabrics and richly ornamented forms and still possess the quality of simplicity, provided only that nothing is included which could have been left out without marring the beauty or impairing the usefulness of the room.

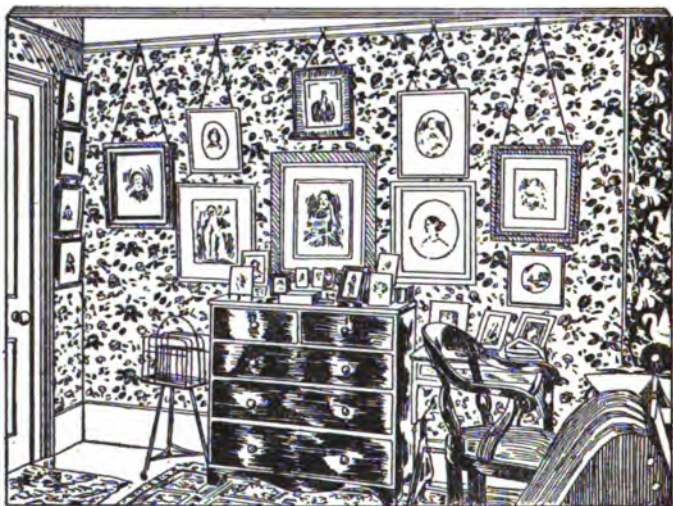
It must be admitted, however, that most American houses do lack simplicity. The American housewife is inclined to accumulate much and to discard little. Her rooms are likely to contain too many colors, too much pattern, too much furniture, too many pictures, particularly too many gew-gaws and gimcracks. It must be remembered that a multitude of little trivial things destroys the unity of a room esthetically and clutters it physically, fatiguing the mind and disturbing the serenity of its occupants. Decoration deals with large spaces, and the mind can grasp the details of small objects only as the result of effort. When it makes such an effort, only to find the object of it commonplace and quite unworthy of attention, a sense of disgust is inevitable. Even when small objects are beautiful and intrinsically interesting they ought to be used sparingly, for their decorative value is in general inversely proportional to their number. It is far better to follow the Japanese custom, displaying these beautiful things a few at a time while the others remain out of sight, than to make all common by too lavish use.

Moreover, any work of art, whether large or small, must be regarded as objectionable in any room unless it is in a decorative sense more valuable than the space it occupies. A given room is limited in size



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and in floor and wall area, as the mind is limited in its power of attention; and since open spaces, an effect of atmosphere and repose, and freedom from too many stimuli are absolutely essential to beauty and comfort,



**FIGURE 2.**—Sidewall utterly lacking in simplicity. The wall paper is unsuitable as a background for the pictures, of which there are far too many.

the decorator must ensure this necessary simplicity, even though he may thereby be compelled to eliminate things of real excellence.

Most of the sermons preached on simplicity during the past twenty years have had for their text William Morris' admonition to have in your house only what you know to be useful and believe to be beautiful. The

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precept is perfect; yet like many others that have to do with conduct it is hard to live up to. Merely to know what is useful demands thoughtful consideration, while to know what is beautiful presupposes the possession of a taste which would render the advice superfluous. Moreover, to discard even the things we know to be useless or unbeautiful involves overcoming the primal instinct of possession which lies miles deep below our surface veneering of culture. To give up the things we own is to go against nature, and we can do it only as we learn to value what we gain by the process more highly than what we lose.

Finally, the power of sentiment is to be reckoned with. Many of the things which taste and judgment warn us to banish possess a sentimental value. They may be family heirlooms, the gifts of valued friends, the injudicious purchases of honeymoon days. Whether through fear of offending the donors, or because we love them, as Desdemona loved Othello, for the distressful strokes their youth has suffered, we are disposed to keep these things in spite of their manifest ugliness and the patent fact that they destroy the simplicity of our rooms. Into the precinct of these intimate considerations the outsider may not venture. What to keep and what to discard is manifestly a matter for each household to decide for itself. But this is certain: If you would have simplicity and beauty you must pay for them. "Every sweet hath its sour; every evil its good."

## CHAPTER III

### THE GRAMMAR OF DECORATION

**W**E have seen that interior decoration is an art of selection and arrangement, working under the guidance of the faculty of taste.

In practice this faculty is first employed in a comprehensive process of elimination. The decorator, having familiarized himself with what is made in furniture, fabrics, and all sorts of decorative accessories, with local market conditions and costs, and with the requirements of the house to be furnished and the needs, tastes and means of its occupants, surveys the whole body of available materials and processes and eliminates from further consideration all those which do not promise to meet adequately the requirements both of the household and the house. There remains a second process, which is to choose from the relatively small body of materials and processes remaining after this twofold elimination those which seem to possess special fitness and beauty, and to combine and arrange them in such a manner as to create a harmonious whole.

This process of combining the parts of any work of art into a whole is called composition. It constitutes, of course, the real creative problem. Writing of the

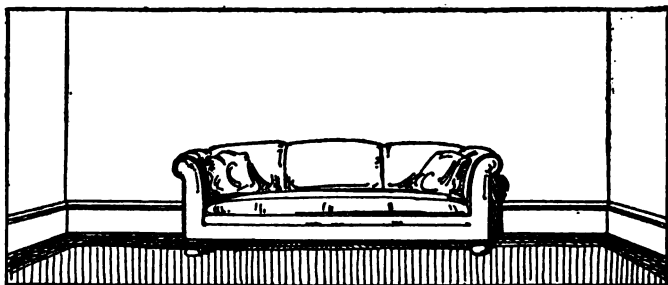
## *The Grammar of Decoration*

art of painting, Ruskin defined composition as the help of everything in the picture by everything else, and the definition applies with equal felicity to the other arts. Poetry combines words into phrases, lines and stanzas in such ways that each word and each phrase helps all the others. Musical composition combines tones into helpful relations known as chords, and helps these chords with rhythm, timbre and expression. Interior decoration takes lines, shapes, colors and textures—or, more concretely, rugs, papers, fabrics, furniture, pictures, statuary, pottery and lamps—and so arranges and combines them in a given space that each is helpful to all the rest.

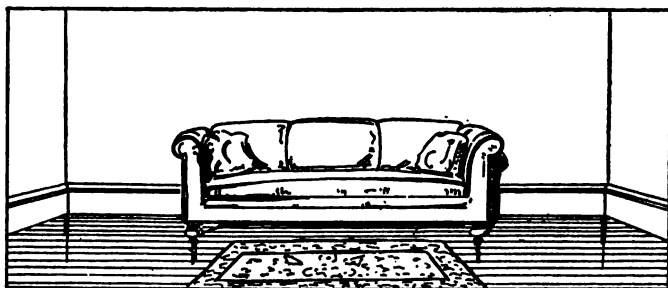
What is meant by the statement that words or tones help each other? Clearly, it can mean only that each contributes, according to its nature and in the most effective way possible, toward the expression of a common idea. Clearly, too, the parts of a furnished room can help each other only in the same way. When we say that things harmonize, or go well together, we mean, whether we are conscious of it or not, that they possess in some degree a common significance and therefore concur in the expression of a common idea. Thus if we place a long, low over-stuffed sofa upon a large, low-toned rug each will help the other because, while they do not look alike, each suggests to the mind the ideas of repose and tranquillity. On the other hand, a small Aubusson rug, or a little Kermanshah, with its light, gay colors and spirited design, could not help such a sofa, because by its very nature it suggests the ideas of animation and buoyancy. Used

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together rug and sofa would oppose or contradict each other, and only a meaningless confusion of ideas could result.



A



B

FIGURE 3.—The long low davenport arouses in the mind a sense of repose and tranquillity. A large low-toned rug or carpet (A) suggests the same ideas; while a small light rug (B), especially when it reveals a pattern made up of spirited curves, suggests the contrary ideas of animation and buoyancy.

It appears, therefore, that in order to make the furnishings of a room harmonize, or help each other, the decorator must see to it that they concur in the

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expression of a common idea. Accordingly he must first of all decide upon a dominant idea to be expressed by the finished room. Having done so, he must choose and combine in the room such things as suggest or help to affirm that idea, and keep out any considerable number of things that suggest an inharmonious or contrary idea. This is the beginning of every process of decorative composition. To undertake it successfully the decorator must know, first, what ideas, or what kind of ideas, can be expressed by his art, and secondly, how they can be expressed.

It is clear that interior decoration, being a part of architecture, can neither set forth an appearance of nature, as can painting and sculpture, nor tell a story, like poetry or the drama. Nor can it, like music or the dance, express complex and changing emotional states. It can, however, adequately express simple emotional ideas ranging through a fairly long gamut. Thus a room may be made bright or somber, grave or gay. Given a suitable architectural background, the decorator can create at will a restful living room, a gay and brilliant ball-room, a solemn church or lodge-room. Rooms may be made dignified, sumptuous, simple, informal. Their emotional quality may be varied from repose to animation, from stateliness to abandon, from rough homeliness to elegance or daintiness. Obviously the choice of the dominant emotional idea for a given room will be determined in practice chiefly by such considerations of fitness as the purpose of the room and the tastes of its occupants. The point to be pressed here is that, however chosen, some defin-

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able emotional idea must underlie and condition the decoration of every artistically furnished room. Good composition, in decoration no less than in the other creative arts, can never be fortuitous—never the product of chance or the play of circumstance. However simple or complex its processes, it must always result in expression. Every great composition in any art is thus built upon a motive, in the expression of which all its chief lines, colors or sounds concur, as the sweeping diagonals and vigorous curves of the Winged Victory of Samothrace concur in investing even the broken remnant of the figure with the idea of imperious and triumphant motion.

A room, however, unlike a picture or a sculptured form, is not complete in itself. It is complete only when there are people in it, and it is decorated not alone to make it harmonious and beautiful, but also—and primarily—to make it a sympathetic and pleasing background for the people who use it. For this reason its emotional quality must not be too strongly emphasized, lest there be lack of harmony with the changing moods of its occupants. Nevertheless every beautiful room, as the first condition of its being, must be built around a dominant motive, and a great part of whatever subtlety and charm its decorative treatment may possess for the person of cultivated taste will depend upon the skill with which this motive is expressed. The child is happy with his blocks; delighted when he is able to find among two dozen strange and meaningless characters the big I or O or S that he has been taught to recognize; content to put the letters together into a

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meaningless jumble. But when he grows older he will want to see meaning in things. Letters will interest him because they are symbols with which words are formed, and words because they in turn are symbols which, properly grouped, give expression to ideas. It is the same with man and his house. A man may choose and arrange the furnishings of his rooms without reference to their significance because, like the child with his blocks, he does not understand their significance. But in so far as interior decoration is a real creative art it must be concerned with the expression of ideas; and in so far as a man has in his esthetic perceptions put away childish things he will be conscious of these ideas and keenly interested in the manner of their expression.

In literature ideas are expressed by words; in interior decoration by form and color. Form itself, as a mode of expression, possesses an emotional significance, and so does color merely as color. Each hue has a peculiar effect upon the mind. The light tones of every hue differ in emotional quality from the dark. Pure colors differ from neutral, and simple colors from compounds. Each type of line tends to arouse a distinctive emotion in the mind, according to its character and its direction. Each of the elementary geometrical forms upon which decorative composition so largely rests possesses its proper emotional significance. The mind is affected by relative size and bulk, by proportion, by balance or the lack of it, by contrast, by every factor employed by the decorator in the practical processes of housefurnishing.

These varying emotional values of form and color



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constitute the words of the language of decoration, and the science of their function and artistic employment constitutes what we may well call its grammar. Obviously the grammar must be mastered before the work of composition can be undertaken successfully. In order to select and combine decorative factors of like significance we must first understand the significance of each individual factor. When the emotional value of each type of line, form, hue and tone has been clearly grasped, whatever decorative motive has been chosen for the room will at once call up into the mind the particular types of form and color that best express or suggest that motive. In practice the decorator will then develop his motive artistically, according to methods to be studied in later chapters, by grouping with these types others more or less like them in significance.

Form and color, the two media of decorative expression, are essentially unlike. Form is intellectual, color emotional. Form requires a mental process for its apprehension. Color requires none, and therefore makes a wider, more instant, and more powerful appeal.

Man's attitude toward form and color has always been influenced by his philosophy. In the Orient color is dominant, because there the soul is regarded as the source of knowledge. In the Occident, where under the influence of Greek philosophy the mind is regarded as the source of knowledge, form is dominant. The Greeks attained to an incomparable perfection of form; they used color merely to outline and to embellish. The Orientals, on the other hand, though they

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have created forms of exquisite and imperishable loveliness, have in all ages used color not as the hand-maiden of form, but for the sake of its own beauty and the subtle spell it casts upon the soul.

Only once in historic times has color been dominant in Europe. During the Middle Ages, under the sway of early Christianity, man's soul became his chief concern, and the mysticism of the age found immediate expression in color. From the ninth to the thirteenth centuries there was everywhere evident—in the dress of the common people, the gay costumes of the nobles, the gorgeous trappings of chivalry and the rich colorings of the medieval houses, as in the glow of stained glass and the red and gold of the cathedrals—the same passion for color that has in all ages moved the East. The passion passed, of course, with the religious and philosophical conditions which helped to create it. Toward the beginning of the modern period, with the approach of the Renaissance or rebirth of the spirit of the Greeks, mysticism died out, and with it color yielded place to form.

After the lapse of centuries the pendulum seems to be starting to swing in the other direction. Certainly two tendencies are everywhere evident in the western world to-day. On the one hand, we see a remarkable increase in the use of color, and of richer and more stimulating color; on the other hand, the decline of intellectualism, and the slow breaking-up of the purely scientific and materialistic ideals by which we have so long been actuated. The spirit of mysticism is coming back into the world; not only contemporary litera-

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ture, but contemporary music and painting are more and more tinged by it. And with mysticism there is coming a deeper and a growing love of color, not for what it reveals and embellishes, but for its own sake.

In its effect upon the mind, form is solid, hard, active and masculine; while color is fluid, soft, passive and feminine. Form is of course imperceptible apart from color, and the two media of expression are of necessity used together in every composition. The relative emphasis placed upon them, however, may be and certainly ought to be varied by the decorator in working out the motive of his treatment. Beyond doubt form has in the past been too much emphasized in our homes, with the result of giving them not only the obvious defects of over-ornamentation and complexity, but also a real though intangible effect of hardness and ungraciousness. The present marked tendency toward the freer use of color and the elimination of non-essential objects and patterns is therefore a much-needed corrective.

However, the primary concern of the decorator is not with the separation of form and color, but with their convergent use in composition. Beauty and the expression of emotional ideas largely depend in all the arts upon the convergence of effects. Such a convergence is produced in symphonic music when a pastoral theme is announced in the high passionless voice of the oboe, and in the drama when a speech is uttered by an actor physically fitted and costumed for his rôle. Pope exemplifies the idea poetically in two couplets:

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"Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,  
And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows.

But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,  
The hoarse rough verse should like the torrent roar."

This principle is of basic importance in decoration, and will be found, as we proceed with this study, to enter into every problem of composition. No room can be beautiful without a convergence of decorative effects, and any room will be more or less beautiful as the convergence is more or less complete. Whatever is said by the proportions of a room, and by its dominant lines and shapes, must be affirmed, not contradicted, by its coloring. Thus if we make low tones of olive, golden-brown or blue dominant in a long, low room filled with furniture largely characterized by horizontal lines and long low shapes, the mind is convinced and satisfied. But if we treat such a room in a gay scheme of azure, rose and ivory, or if we venture upon a staid and somber coloring in a room marked by light yielding forms and gay upturned curves, the mind, perplexed by the pull of opposing esthetic forces, is dissatisfied, and filled with the consciousness of confusion and hence of ugliness.

In the three following chapters we shall study the grammar of decoration, and shall attempt to develop, as fully as possible in so limited a compass, the emotional significance or meaning of the elementary factors of the art. With the completion of this task we shall be equipped to take up the principles of composition, which underlie the art of selecting and combining these elements into artistic wholes.

## CHAPTER IV

### LINE AND FORM

**I**F the nose of Cleopatra had been shorter," observed Pascal, "the whole face of the world would have been changed." The power of line is indisputable. Yet it is clear that in itself line is a mere mathematical abstraction, and that the lines drawn by the artist are after all but marks. Their power to move us lies in something outside of themselves, and the explanation of this power must be sought, not in lines and spatial forms as such, but in the nature of the mind.

Man is a creature who lies prone when he is asleep or at rest and stands erect in action. In a stern or resistant mood he stands stiff and straight; in a playful or happy mood he relaxes, and the lines of his body fall into easy curves. When he carries a load upon his shoulder his body bends into reciprocal curves—slight curves if the load is light, deeper and more angular as the load grows heavier; until finally he stoops upon one knee the better to bear up his burden, as Atlas stoops to bear up the earth. When a man is in motion he bends forward; slightly if he walks, deeply if he runs. When he encounters an opposing force he braces himself against it, and the

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greater the force the sharper will be the angle of his body and the straighter the line of it.

Because he has been doing these things for unnumbered generations—because certain emotional states always find expression through definite positions—man associates the emotions with the lines that define their accompanying positions, so that a given line in a work of art has the power to call up into consciousness, more or less vividly, its concomitant emotional state. Thus straight lines are always associated with the ideas of steadiness and force, and curved lines with the ideas of flexibility, buoyancy and grace. And because horizontal extension is always associated with the idea of repose, and vertical extension always with the ideas of life and activity, horizontal and vertical lines, whether straight or curved, always call up, the one ideas of calmness and repose, the other ideas of activity and support. This contrast between horizontal and vertical extension is the original factor in visual esthetics, and all of what Professor Theodor Lipps calls the life quality (*Lebendigkeit*) of architectural and decorative forms grows out of the interplay of these activities and is expressed by the interplay and contrast of horizontal and vertical lines.

Our emotions are stirred by spatial forms, whether natural or artistic, because we project or “feel ourselves into” them. Not only do we feel ourselves running or straining with the athlete at the games; we feel ourselves pushing upward with the column and striving upward with the tower. “The Discobolus of Myron,” says Lipps, “bows his body, throws out his

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arm, turns his head. Not the marble of which the statue consists does these things, but the man that the statue represents. Of the man, however, nothing is present in the statue save the form—the man-resembling spatial form (*die menschenähnliche Raumgestalt*); it is simply that this spatial form is in our imagination filled with a definite human life. The marble is the material of the representation; the object of the representation is the life bound up in the form.”

Lines as they appear in architectural and decorative design are in character straight, curved, or broken, and in direction horizontal, vertical, or oblique. In composition the emotional significance of each type tends to be affirmed and intensified by the repetition of like lines, and to be contradicted and neutralized by the employment of lines of an opposing type.

The first difference in significance between straight and curved lines, as Raymond has pointed out, is the fact that the latter suggest the results of instinctive action, while the former suggest the results of reflective action. Nearly everything in nature, from grass to man himself, grows in curves. It is only when man starts to reflect and to contrive—to build temples and tombs and engines of construction and destruction—that straight lines appear. Thus they are inevitably associated with what is thoughtful, serious, purposive and austere. For this reason ~~straight lines~~ are employed in designing the structural elements of a room, and are emphasized in the design of furniture, rugs and hangings in the degree that the motive of the decorative unit and of the room as a whole is serious or austere.



*Courtesy of the British Museum.*

**PLATE II.—The Discus Thrower.** Under the law of empathy (*einfühlung*) we “feel ourselves into” spatial forms, both animate and inanimate.





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The Italian chairs of the early Renaissance owed their fine air of virility and thoughtful contrivance largely to their straight lines, as do our own Craftsman and Mission chairs; but the latter, by reason of their exclusive use of such lines, reveal a quality of hardness, ungraciousness and austerity from which the former

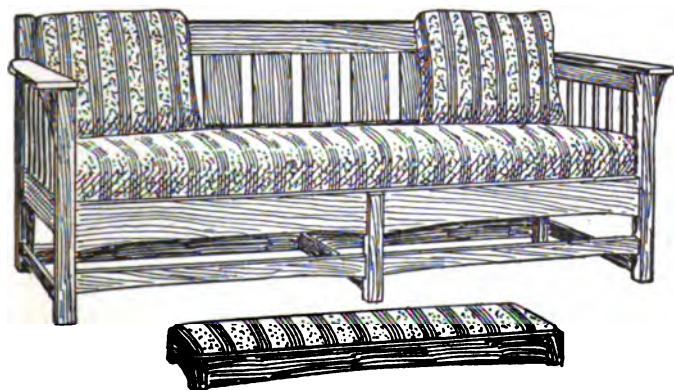


FIGURE 4.—The effect of repose characteristic of this sofa is due to its length as opposed to its height. Its effect of hardness and austerity is due to the almost exclusive employment of straight line in its design.

were redeemed by the saving grace of carved finials, turned arm supports, and velvet or damask coverings. The same quality of hardness through over-emphasis of straight lines is apparent in Kazak, Bokhara, Afghan and many other rugs woven by primitive Oriental peoples, and in primitive ornament generally. As the worker in any art so masters his technique that he is able to work more or less instinctively he naturally

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chooses to express himself more and more through the freedom, buoyancy and grace of curved lines, and to restrict his use of straight lines to situations where the significance of his work or its structural requirements demand their steadiness and force. As men and races grow in their power of seeing the beautiful they demand an increasing degree of subtlety in all forms of art—subtler ideas, and subtler modes of expression—and because straight lines are by nature direct, unvarying and obvious they more and more give place to curves.

✓ Curved lines express the ideas of flexibility, softness, grace, and joyousness, and tend to impart these qualities to any composition in which they appear. When over-emphasized by too exclusive employment, as in Rococo ornament and in the decorative styles of the Regency and Louis XV, they yield an effect of over-luxuriousness, instability, and even of weakness. When their lines are short and much broken, as in Rococo ornament, they suggest the mutable and transient; when crossed and interwoven, as in Celtic and Arabic ornament, the complex, obscure and elusive. Sinuous or undulating curves, as they appear in the guilloche molding and in the running vine border of Persian rugs, suggest the idea of movement; and up-turned curves, particularly when their effect is intensified by repetition, the ideas of gayety, animation and delight, as the corners of the mouth turn upward in a smile. Wall papers and hangings in which such curves are emphasized are used to help in creating an effect of smiling animation in rooms that need it, and all

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festal decoration makes a very free use of loops, festoons and swags.

By the free employment of curves the decorator can avoid the stiffness and severity that result from over-emphasis of straight lines, and give effects of softness, grace, buoyancy and richness to his rooms. Beauty of form, in nature as in art, from the single leaf to the perfect human body, and from the unadorned simplicity of a vase to the complex loveliness of the Taj Mahal, depends first of all upon the power of curved lines. Moreover, it is impossible in decoration to express the full significance of things that are by nature soft, flexible or luxurious without the free use of curves. Thus velvet draperies look a little stiff when surmounted by straight-lined lambrequins; deep-pile rugs lack something of softness unless they reveal curved lines in either field or border; and the most luxurious of over-stuffed sofas appear bulky, ungraceful and a little stiff unless the long straight lines of their backs are rounded at each end into softening curves.

However, there is no virtue in curves merely as curves. A straight line is always to be preferred, at whatever cost of rigidity and obviousness, to a weak and meaningless curve. The decorator cannot hope to create beauty, or even to recognize its presence, until he is able to discriminate unerringly between curves that are graceful, subtle and yet vigorous, and curves awkward, commonplace and unlovely. Much has been written of curves and the laws of curvature, but a feeling for the beauty of curved lines must be

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acquired through long processes of observation and comparison, and can in fact be acquired in no other way. Nature offers an unlimited field for study. The petals of rose, iris or honeysuckle, the stems and branches of willow or birch, the leaves of jonquil or cattail or palm—all reveal curves of infinite variety and exquisite grace. The human body, as it is represented in painting and sculpture and in books illustrative of those arts, offers the most perfect examples of composition in curves. Books on architecture and historic furniture, and manuals of ornament and design are also valuable. The materials chosen for study and the methods of using them are relatively unimportant, provided only that they afford the eye such training as will equip it for instant and discriminating judgment.

It is especially important and especially difficult to acquire a sure feeling for beauty and vigor in the curves that define the weight-bearing elements of a composition; for it is to be noted that while horizontal curves may be employed freely and with wide latitude, vertical curves must be designed with great circumspection. Under the law of empathy the mind "feels itself into" the forms defined by curved lines. When these lines are horizontal, as at the back of a davenport, or dependent, as in a lamp shade or at the bottom of a lambrequin—in a word, when they are supported, not supporting—the mind regards almost any pitch or degree of curvature as reasonable and therefore as satisfactory; but when curves are bearing a load the mind expects to find the curvature adjusted to the load, and is dissatisfied and perturbed when this is



PLATE III.—The effect of repose characteristic of this table is due to its length. Its effect of seriousness, dignity, and thoughtful contrivance is due to the emphasis upon long straight lines. The table is in a measure redeemed from austerity by curved line, and enriched by carved ornament.



## *Line and Form*

not the case. For example, in a well-designed eighteenth century table the light top is supported by slender legs having but a slight cyma or line of beauty curve; and this the mind regards as suitable and beautiful because the body of a man bearing upon his shoulder one corner of a light platform would be similarly relaxed into slight but easy curves. Therefore light tables supported by slender legs which describe a deep curve—and these are exceedingly common—have for the trained eye an exaggerated, strained and grotesque appearance, because the sweep of the curves appears to be out of all proportion to the load borne by the legs. On the other hand, the heavy tables of the Italian and French Renaissance were supported by end brackets revealing very deep curves, and this the mind regards as reasonable and beautiful because a man likewise heavily burdened would stoop, with his chest bent far forward over his knees. Nowhere in decoration is there more ugliness than in weak, exaggerated and ungraceful vertical curves. Only by long study of both the great and the decadent periods of decorative art can one acquire the power to know good from evil.

Broken lines, by reason of their sudden changes, suggest the ideas of life and animation. While such lines may appear as dentil moldings in cornice, mantel or reading table, or in the bottom lines of lambrequins, they have little place in the fixed decorations of a room—that is, in walls, openings, floor coverings, hangings and the large immovable pieces of furniture—which are by nature tranquil and relatively solemn.



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Broken lines are appropriately used in chair backs, screens, book-blocks with a row of books between, and pillows that break the long back line of couch or davenport, because it is one of the functions of these light and relatively unimportant elements to give life



FIGURE 5.—The legs of this sofa reveal a degree of curvature too marked for the weight they bear. The curves of the back are weak and lacking in distinction; those of the front are commonplace and lacking in subtlety.

and animation to a room. Broken lines are always to be used sparingly, since too many of them perplex and fatigue the eye, and particular care must be taken to avoid any appearance of arithmetical progression, which, as in the case of small pictures or photographs so arranged that they present a series of steps, inevitably catch the attention, lead it to the top, and there

## *Line and Form*

leave it suspended, thus destroying the poise and symmetry of the wall. It sometimes happens, particularly in small and inexpensively built houses, that the tops of windows in the same room are on slightly different levels, so that they present a disturbing effect of broken and irregular line. Whenever possible this defect should be corrected by the use of a valance hung far enough above the lower window to bring the apparent tops to the same level.

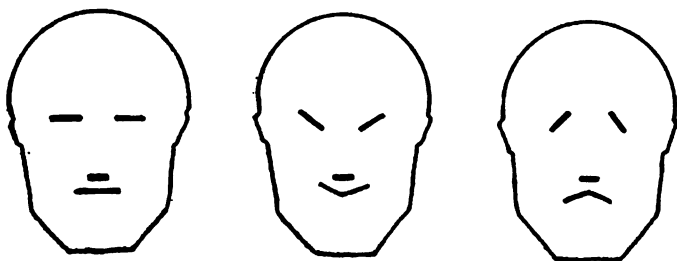


FIGURE 6.—The three faces express, with remarkable clearness, the ideas of calmness, of gaiety, and of desolate sadness. These faces are identical except for the direction of the broken lines.

Broken lines may be made to suggest ideas of gaiety or gravity, in the arrangement of mantel, bookcase or table ornaments, or in the arrangement of groups of furniture, according to whether their tops form a V upright or inverted. The principle involved, which lies at the basis of expression in the visual arts, is illustrated in the curious old drawing of Humbert de Superville.

Horizontal lines express the ideas of calmness, quiescence and repose; vertical lines of support, activity and life. In the degree that either horizontal or vertical

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lines are long and straight they add to their primary significance the ideas of permanence and dignity. Straight horizontal lines give to any composition in which they are dominant an effect of quietude and duration; straight vertical lines of firmness, and when over-emphasized, of stiffness and even of sternness. The function and employment of horizontal and vertical extension, and of the lines by which they are defined, will be developed in the chapter on proportion.

Vertical lines tend to express as well as to arouse emotions of exaltation and inquietude. Owing to the relatively short length of any lines inside a room this effect is rarely perceptible except by abnormally sensitive persons, but it is clearly felt in monumental architecture. The Gothic cathedrals perfectly expressed the sentiments of inquietude and exaltation that possessed the soul of northern Europe in the later Middle Ages, and they tend to arouse the same emotions in the soul of the beholder to-day. The feeling that takes possession of one who from the Hudson river sees the shaft-like buildings of lower New York outlined against a twilight sky, or who stands at the foot of the Washington Monument or the Sather Tower at Berkeley and follows the seemingly endless verticals as they appear to erect themselves, by sheer force of aspiration, heavenward, is inspired by the same power of line.

Diagonal lines suggest movement and action. Because they are associated in the mind with motion or with the effort to counterbalance resistance they give animation to any composition in which they appear.

## *Line and Form*

Over-emphasized, they are restless and fatiguing. Used sparingly, as when a small poised figure like the Flying Mercury is placed in a quiet corner of a room, they possess an extraordinary charm.

Unless too strongly emphasized by color contrast diagonals are often effective in rug design; partly because they are there arranged symmetrically to form the medallion, partly because they are subordinated to and restrained by the straight lines of the border. They are objectionable in all-over carpets and especially objectionable in wall papers. Repetition of the same figure is a mechanical necessity in weaving or printing piece goods, and in the very large class of designs technically known as drop patterns each motive or figure comes above and to the right and left of the same figure in each of the adjoining breadths. Unless the pattern is very skillfully drawn and colored, this arrangement is likely to create a series of diagonals, more or less marked according to the size and character of the design and the vigor of the coloring. These diagonals give to any room in which they appear a quality of energetic and rhythmic movement always inartistic and tiresome and often almost intolerable. It must of course be noted that this objection does not lie against patterns formed by intersecting diagonals which result in a diaper of small diamond forms or rhombs, because the effect of movement created by the lines running in one direction is neutralized by the opposing lines.

In practice the decorator must also be on guard against inartistic diagonals in choosing upholstery fab-

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rics. It is a common practice to use a boldly designed printed linen at the windows of a room and also as slip covers for some of the over-stuffed furniture. Many of the most strikingly decorative linens, especially those adapted from old Persian textiles, contain a sharply accented vine which runs obliquely from one side of the fabric to the other. This is of course unobjectionable in hangings, because the folds break the movement; but when the same pattern runs vigorously from the bottom of one side of a wide chair back to the top of the other side the effect is unpleasing, because it destroys the atmosphere of repose which it is one of the functions of such a chair to create.

The three dimensions, height, width and depth, respectively suggest the ideas of spiritual elevation, stability and mystery. When the dimensions of a composition are normal they tend to neutralize each other, and the mind is conscious of no emotional significance. When any one is over-emphasized the value of the other two is diminished accordingly. It is almost never desirable to over-emphasize any dimension of a room; the more nearly its proportions approximate those that the eye regards as normal the more satisfactory the room will be. In the choice of individual units, however, the principle is constantly employed. Thus it is impossible to produce through the use of short, high tables, chairs and cabinets the impression of stability produced by long low ones; impossible to create by means of a mantel clock the sense of elevation—of calm indifference to the hurries and anxieties of life—created by a hall clock; impossible to effect in any room



*Courtesy of the British Museum.*

PLATE IV.—Greek vases which illustrate the differences in emotional effect between the circle and the oval as employed in decorative composition.

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## *Line and Form*

without draperies the slight but intriguing sense of mystery and charm possessed by a room with deep and carefully arranged hangings.

Shapes, whether they appear as simple geometrical forms, or as compositions based upon or roughly defined or outlined by such forms, possess emotional significances which depend in part upon the character of their bounding lines and in part upon their proportions. Thus the square suggests strength and solidity because it combines equally the firmness and support of vertical lines and the repose of horizontals. The straight lines which define it make it obvious, however, while the equality of its dimensions deprives it of subtlety and tends to make it monotonous and therefore of limited value in decorative design. Square rooms are for this reason relatively uninteresting, and so are square wall spaces, windows, and fireplaces, and square rugs, tables, chairbacks, bookcases and pictures. What is true of the square is of course equally true of the cube. Cabinets, stools, seats or stands cubical in shape are rarely good-looking, unless, as sometimes happens, their beauty of carving or surface ornament obscures their tedious forms; while the big cubical chairs so often seen are esthetically tiresome and physically uncomfortable as well.

The oblong is the commonest form in decorative art, where it appears in floors, ceilings, walls, doors, and windows, in rugs, chairs, tables, bookcases and books, and in fact in nearly every object of use or ornament. Like the square, the oblong combines straight vertical and horizontal lines, which tend to make it obvious,



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but its extensions are never in equilibrium and the form therefore possesses an interest lacking in the simpler form. The beauty and decorative value of oblong shapes depends chiefly upon the subtlety of their proportions, and will be discussed in the chapter dealing with that subject, as will the use of vertical or horizontal oblongs in the convergent expression of emotional ideas.

The triangle appears in decoration both as a motive and as a principle of composition. When resting upon its base it expresses a subtle quality of animation or movement in repose—the two diagonal lines contributing the idea of movement and its broad base, as contrasted with its pointed apex, the idea of repose. In the isosceles triangle the two lines of movement are equal, and the figure accordingly suggests a symmetrical or balanced activity. It appears in lamp-shades, mantel clocks, the pediments of bookcases and highboys, and the supports of benches and tables; and as a principle of composition it is constantly employed by the decorator to give an effect of unity and balanced activity in the arrangement of mirror and console table, chair groupings, and in the disposition of pictures, pottery, or other small objects upon or above cabinets, mantels or bookcases. The isosceles triangle resting upon its point is occasionally employed in the design of fabrics and wall papers, where it yields an elusive effect of flame-like motion. The same motive is frequently found in Turcoman rugs, where it symbolizes the altars of an earlier faith, and the flame that anciently burned upon them.

## *Line and Form*

Curved forms are easier to see than those of rectangular outline, and are therefore in general more agreeable. They vary in subtlety and in esthetic interest according to their outline. The circle, whose bounding line forever returns upon itself, suggests the ideas of completeness and finality. This quality renders it somewhat monotonous when used as a decorative unit, though it is of great value when used as the basis of repeating pattern. In the decoration of the dining room the table is of course the focal point—the motive to whose proper setting-out all other decorative elements are subordinated. And since a dining table is sufficiently large and massive to dominate the room it often happens that this very effect of completeness makes a round table more valuable decoratively than an oblong one. In the living room, on the contrary, large round tables are ordinarily objectionable, not only by reason of the lack of subtlety in their proportions, but also because they are out of harmony with the prevailing oblongs, being unlike them both in outline and in proportions. For the same reason circular mirrors, pictures and other wall ornaments do not compose well with the wall spaces. This objection does not apply, of course, to small occasional tables and other little circular forms which make themselves felt only as piquant accents in the general composition of the room; but in the design of larger units the circle is normally employed only as a device for securing emphasis through contrast.

The ellipse and the oval have a longer and a shorter axis, and therefore bear the same relation to the circle

## *The Principles of Interior Decoration*

that the oblong bears to the square. They are more agreeable than the circle physiologically because, owing to the peculiar construction of the eyes, they are physically easier to see. They are far more agreeable emotionally, in part because of the subtlety inherent in the constant change of direction of their bounding lines, and in part because there is in the rhythmic alternation of these changes, and in the symmetrical swell and subsidence of the forms themselves, a hint of the mysterious dualism of life—of the flow and ebb, systole and diastole, inspiration and aspiration whence arises that sense of harmonious completeness which is the basic esthetic condition.

## CHAPTER V

### COLOR

**C**OLOR covers everything, outlining and emphasizing shapes and making them easy to see. Its wide distribution, instant appeal, and powerful emotional effect made it a dominant element in the language of decoration. Delight in color is a universal human characteristic, found among the most primitive as well as among the most highly cultivated peoples. It has been a factor of importance in both biological and social evolution, and is doubtless destined to be an even more important factor in the cultural evolution of the future. Having the power to arouse or to sooth, to cheer or to depress, color largely creates the atmosphere, the in-dwelling and pervading influence, of our homes. By color our rooms are made grave or gay, warm or cool, suave, sympathetic or repellent.

Color is a property of light. When the light goes out color goes with it. Sitting in a drawing room as afternoon passes into evening, we see the rich and glowing colors of textiles, pictures and porcelains lose first their brilliancy, then their distinctive hues, and finally disappear altogether, as a flaming sunset fades into gray and deadens into black.

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Solar energy reaches the earth in the form of ether vibrations of varying wave-length. Those which fall between certain maximum and minimum limits affect the nerves of the eye and yield the sensations of color. The white light of the sun is made up of a great number of rays so blended as to yield no sensation of color. If, however, a beam of white light be passed through a prism it is broken down into its constituent elements, which appear as separate bands of colored light. Some surfaces, illumined by white light, reflect practically all the rays, and therefore appear to be white. Other surfaces absorb practically all the rays and reflect none, and therefore appear to be black. Most surfaces, however, absorb all the rays except those which yield a single color sensation, and therefore appear to be of that color. Thus a blue ribbon is a ribbon which absorbs all the rays except blue. Most surfaces, moreover, reflect not only a characteristic colored light but also a greater or less amount of white light, so that a blue ribbon may be so light as to appear almost white, or so dark as to appear almost black.

The light rays, as they are reflected by all the surfaces within the field of vision, are received by the eye and focused upon the retina, a recording apparatus of incomprehensible fineness and complexity, made up of millions of nerves which appear under the microscope in the form of infinitesimal rods and cones, each of which is connected with the optic nerve leading to the brain. Just what takes place in the eye when light enters it is not known, but there is reason to believe that while the rods are chiefly sensitive to white light the

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cones are sensitive to vibrations of definite wave-lengths only, and are thus capable of communicating to the brain a definite color sensation. When the cones normally affected by vibrations of a given wave-length are absent or fail to function properly the corresponding color sensation cannot be registered in the brain, and the person whose eye is so constructed is color blind. The color nerves tire quickly. When the eye is compelled to gaze at the same hue for some time the nerves employed become tired and incapable of a vivid sensation, as every one has noticed in matching colors. They must be relieved temporarily by another set of nerves—a fact that shows the physical basis for the esthetic need of variety in color composition.

The study of color is made more difficult by the fact color phenomena are investigated and described in terms of colored light by the physicist, and in terms of pigments by the artist and color worker. The scientist, passing a ray of light through a spectroscope, finds that it is broken down into a flat band of color containing more than a thousand hues, with red at one end and violet at the other; that these hues stand in definite relationships to each other; and that they behave in certain ways when variously combined.

The artist, however, does not work with colored lights, but with pigments, which lack the power of complete absorption and therefore yield results different from those obtained when working with light. Since we are concerned in interior decoration almost exclusively with the pigment colors, and are in fact concerned primarily with color perception and only inci-

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dentally with color theory, it seems wiser in the brief study of color to be included in this volume to follow—with reservations—Chevreul and the older colorists. This method will afford the easiest and most simple approach to the subject, and the most helpful results in practice. The student who wants an accurate knowledge of the scientific theories of color can consult Rood, Von Bezold and Luckiesh.

There are three pigmental hues which cannot be produced by any admixture of other colors, but which are themselves capable of producing, in conjunction with black and white, all other colors. These three colors, which for this reason are called the primaries, are red, yellow and blue. Being as unlike as possible, they may, for the sake of clearness in color study, be conceived as lying at the points of an equilateral triangle inscribed within the circumference of a circle, as in Figure 7. Any two of the primaries can be mixed to form a third color which partakes equally of the qualities of its constituent primaries. Thus red and yellow yield orange, yellow and blue yield green, and blue and red yield violet. These resultant hues, which are called the secondaries, or binaries, will accordingly lie midway between the two primaries which unite to form them and directly opposite the third primary on the chromatic circle.

Instead of uniting any two of the primaries to form binaries, or colors partaking equally of the qualities of their components, we can of course unite them in different proportions to form other hues partaking unequally of these qualities. Thus red can be made



*Courtesy of the National Gallery.*

PLATE V.—Velasquez: *The Rokeby Venus*. Note the repose of horizontal lines; the grace, softness and buoyancy of curved lines; the subtle beauty of curves repeated, opposed and balanced.





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dominant in a mixture of red and yellow in a degree that will produce red-orange, a color sharing equally the qualities of red and of orange, and therefore properly lying midway between those colors on the chromatic circle. Similarly, yellow may be made dominant in a degree to form yellow-orange, lying midway between orange and yellow. This process can be continued indefinitely, since it is manifest that any two

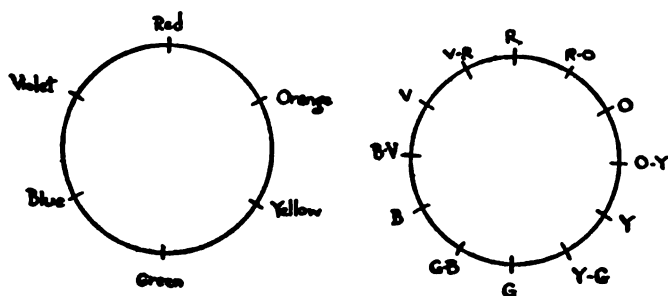


FIGURE 7.—The three primaries, red, yellow and blue, and the binaries, orange, green and violet; the chromatic circle, showing a sequence of twelve hues.

primaries can be united in any proportions whatever, thus obtaining in theory an infinity of hues differing by infinitesimal gradations. Most of these hues have not been standardized or named. Chevreul, the pioneer in color theory, divided the chromatic circle into seventy-two parts. Ridgeway, whose *Color Standards and Nomenclature* is an extraordinarily painstaking and most valuable work, makes a division of the spectrum hues—including those hues between violet and red, which do not appear in the solar spectrum—into thirty-

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six colors, which are here given in their order from red through orange, yellow, green, blue, violet and back to red. The letters R, O-R, OO-R, and so on, indicate the proper positions of the hues in the circle, as well as the relative proportions of the two components in each hue. The names are those employed by the author.

<b>Red</b>	Spectrum red	B-G	Skobeloff green
O-R	Scarlet red	BB-G	Benzol green
OO-R	Scarlet	G-B	Italian blue
R-O	Grenadine red	BG-B	Cerulean blue
OR-O	Flame scarlet	G-BB	Methyl blue
<b>Orange</b>	Orange chrome	<b>Blue</b>	Spectrum blue (lighter in tone than ultramarine)
OY-O	Cadmium orange	BV-B	Bradley's blue
Y-O	Orange (the color of the fruit)	V-B	Phenyl blue (slightly lighter than Smalt blue)
O-Y	Cadmium yellow	B-V	Blue violet
YO-Y	Light cadmium	VB-V	Bluish violet
O-YY	Lemon chrome	<b>Violet</b>	Spectrum violet (slightly lighter than royal purple)
<b>Yellow</b>	Lemon yellow	VR-V	Amethyst violet
YG-Y	Greenish yellow	R-V	Violet purple
G-Y	Bright green yellow	RR-V	Purple (true)
GG-Y	Neva green	V-R	Rhodamine purple
Y-G	Yellow green (slightly lighter than Cos-sack)	RV-R	Tyrian rose
GY-G	Night green	V-RR	Rose red (slightly lighter than pomegranate; slightly darker than rose color)
<b>Green</b>	Emerald green		
GB-G	Vivid green (slightly lighter than Vari-dian; lighter than Chrysoprase)		

Each hue thus formed by the mixture of two primaries, in whatever proportions, will have the same intensity as the primaries themselves; and since these pure colors are intolerable except in the smallest areas, we must in color work change their character by adding

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black, white, or gray, or by neutralization through the use of complementaries. Thus, by adding a little black to each color in the chromatic circle we obtain a new circle of colors, slightly darker and duller than the original hues. By adding a little more black we obtain a second circle, still darker and more dull; and this process can be continued until the amount of black in the mixture renders the original hues practically indistinguishable. Another series can be produced by adding white in progressively increasing quantities to the spectrum hues, up to the point where the original colors become the palest of tints and practically indistinguishable, like the colors on the inside of a shell. Chevreul, in the color plates included in *Des Couleurs*, makes the change by regular ten per cent. increases in the quantity of black or white. Ridgeway gives a typical eight interval scale, starting with spectrum red and ranging downward to black and upward to white:

Tone	Percentages		
	White	Red	Black
White	100		
Hermosa pink	45	55	
Eosine pink	22.5	77.5	
Begonia rose	9.5	90.5	
Spectrum red		100	
Carmine		55	45
Oxblood red		29.5	70.5
Victoria lake		12.5	87.5
Black			100

In addition to these scales produced by the addition of varying quantities of black or white to the spectrum

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hues, we can produce new colors by adding to each of the spectrum hues definite and increasing amounts of neutral gray, the effect of these additions being, not to make the colors increasingly darker or lighter, but rather to make them increasingly less pure and more grayish. The table below, which, together with the one that follows, is also taken from Ridgeway's work, illustrates the process as applied to spectrum red:

Color name	Percentages	
	Red	Neutral gray
<i>Spectrum red</i>	100	
Eugenia red	68	32
Dark vinaceous red	42	58
Livid brown	23	77
Purple drab	10	90
Neutral gray		100

Using any one of these grayed-out variants of the spectrum hues as a base we can in turn construct a new scale ranging in value from black upward to white:

White	White	White	White
Venetian pink	Pale vinaceous	Pale purplish vinaceous	Pallid purple drab
Alizarine pink	Vinaceous	Light purplish vinaceous	Pale purple drab
Old rose	Deep vinaceous	Purplish vinaceous	Light purple drab
<i>Eugenia red</i>	<i>Dark vinaceous</i>	<i>Livid brown</i>	<i>Purple drab</i>
Acajou red	Hydrangea red	Deep livid brown	Dark purple drab
Vandyke red	Mineral red	Dark livid brown	Dusky brown
Hay's maroon	Dark mineral red	Warm blackish brown	Blackish brown
Black	Black		Black

If we take a considerable quantity of orange cadmium paint and add to it a very small amount of ultramarine blue, the orange will immediately lose a little of its purity and become slightly more grayish, and it

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will continue to grow progressively less orange and more gray as the amount of blue in the mixture is progressively increased, until finally all trace of orange disappears and nothing remains but a neutral gray. /Any two hues which thus complete each other in the production of neutral gray are called complementary colors. /In the chromatic circle each one of a pair of complementaries lies directly opposite the other, since each is made up of a hue or hues which have no part in the composition of the other.

It is obvious that a pair of complementary colors will neutralize each other completely—that is, they will unite to form a colorless gray—only when they are mixed in a certain proportion, and that when they are mixed in any other proportion the result will not be a neutral gray, but a more or less grayish tone of the hue which is in excess in the mixture. An unlimited variation in these stages of neutralization is therefore possible, but for the sake of clearness three stages are ordinarily recognized in decorative practice. Thus we speak of full intensity colors, and of colors of three-fourth, one-half and one-fourth intensity. The resulting colors are in intensity the same as would be produced by the addition to the spectrum hues of one, two, and three parts of neutral gray. Thus the pure scarlet of the spectrum becomes, when reduced to three-fourths intensity, coral red. When reduced to one-half intensity it becomes Etruscan red; while at one-fourth intensity it is a deep brownish mauve.

It is clear from the preceding discussion that the colors differ from each other in several ways, and that

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to speak of a color as red, or blue, or violet is to communicate to the mind of the auditor a very incomplete and inaccurate idea of the real nature of the color. In fact a color, in order to be accurately characterized, must be described in terms of three different attributes, called the color constants. These constants are hue, purity or intensity, and luminosity or value.

Hue is that property of a color which depends upon its optical composition, and determines its position in the chromatic circle. Thus red, orange, yellow-green, blue-violet and purple are hues. Normal hues are hues which approach as closely as possible in pigments to the colors of the solar spectrum. Emerald is the normal hue of green, and grenadine red the normal hue of red-orange. Colors which are darker than the normal hue are called dark colors; those which are lighter than the normal are called light colors. Those variations of a hue which are produced by the addition of black to the normal are called shades of that hue; while those formed by the addition of white are called tints of the hue. Thus carmine is a shade of red and begonia rose is a tint of red.

The purity or intensity of a color depends upon its relative freedom from white light. Purity therefore expresses the amount or degree of the hue present, as distinguished from the total amount of light, both white and colored, present. While no pigments are wholly free from white light, the normal hues are called pure. They lose purity as they are progressively neutralized by union with their complementaries, or degraded by the admixture of black, white or neutral gray. Thus

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garnet, la France, and jasper red are impure variants of scarlet-red, formed respectively by the addition of black, white and neutral gray to the normal.

Luminosity or value is that characteristic of a color which depends upon the total amount of light, both colored and white, reflected to the eye. Value, in painting and the allied arts, is defined by the Century dictionary as the relation of one object, part or atmospheric plane of a picture to the others with reference to light and shade, the idea of hue being abstracted. Thus normal yellow, though it is identical with normal red in purity, exceeds it in luminosity. White exceeds all the hues in luminosity, while the tints of any hue are more luminous than its shades, in direct proportion to the white in the mixture, and without any reference to the relative purity or neutrality of the hue. The value of a given color may be determined by comparing it with a scale of neutral grays, ranging from black with a value of 0 to white with a value of 100; or, roughly, with the gamut black, dark-gray, gray, light-gray and white.

Variations in the luminosity or brightness of a color are called tones of that color. The summer sky, surveyed from horizon to zenith, reveals numberless tones of blue, as a distant forest or a field of young grain reveal numberless tones of green or yellow-green. This usage of the word tone must be carefully noted, for it will be constantly and consistently employed. It differs from the usage of painters, who ordinarily employ the word tone to express similarity of tone, or the prevalence of like tones.



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It is in fact imperative that the reader who desires to understand the discussion of color included in this study of interior decoration accept the few definitions of color terms precisely as they are stated. Definitions are absolutely necessary to clear concepts, and inasmuch as writers on color habitually use its terms with varying connotations, the words employed in this volume with one significance may be encountered elsewhere with another. The study of color is perplexing at best. It becomes unintelligible when there is any doubt as to the meaning of the terms employed.

The unscientific and confusing system of color nomenclature is, unhappily, a source of perplexities which no care can unravel. Color has always been more a matter of fancy and of fashion than of exact knowledge, and as a result the hundreds of color names used in the arts have been drawn indiscriminately from any source that proved suggestive—from the earth and the heavens above the earth and the waters beneath it—and applied in ways nearly always inexact and frequently misleading. Of all the hues the blue-reds have the most accurately-descriptive terms, perhaps because the violets and purples have always been of more interest to poets than to common men; yet even here there is no pretense of a scientific or even of an accurate nomenclature. For example, to take a few only of these color names, the term purple comes from a shell; violet, lilac, lavender, mauve, iris, amaranth, petunia and hyacinth from flowers; mulberry, raspberry, plum and prune from fruits; and amethyst—the word itself means a remedy for drunkenness—from

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a stone. Puce is French for flea; gridelin is contracted from gris de lin; Bishop's purple and London smoke are loosely descriptive, and elephant's breath is a pure creation of the fancy of an earlier day.

/ With the best intentions in the world it is quite impossible to use such terms exactly, or even intelligibly, so that among professional workers in color—to say nothing of laymen—a given color name will rarely convey precisely the same idea to two different individuals. The inevitable confusion is heightened by manufacturers, who not only constantly launch new color names, but also employ widely varying colors under the old names. Many more or less complete and elaborate systems of color notation have been devised, notably those of Chevreul, Maxwell, Oberthür et Dauthenay, and Ridgeway; but these systems have never been widely adopted. Considerable progress toward standardization has been made in the last decade; but at the present time the great number of color sensations can be described with approximate accuracy only in terms of their relations to the primary and binary hues, and to black, white and gray. This system is clumsy and tedious, but it is the best available to one who desires to be widely understood.

The effects of color upon our emotional states are indubitable. As to the degree in which these effects are due on the one hand to association of ideas and on the other to differences in the rapidity of light-ray vibrations it is impossible in the light of our present knowledge to speak definitely. Red is the color of fire and of blood, as violet is the color of shadows, and

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it is inconceivable that the mind could remain unaffected by these associations in the presence of either color. On the other hand, red lies at one end of the spectrum and violet at the other, and it is equally inconceivable that the brain, as a physical organism, could remain unaffected by the enormously different rates of vibration. In any case the matter is of scientific interest only. It is enough for the decorator to know that the various hues possess distinctive emotional qualities; that the colors vary in emotional value not only with hue, but also with purity and luminosity; and that through proper selection of the hues, proper emphasis upon purity or neutrality and upon high or low tones, he can—with the convergent use of line and form—express in his rooms any motive that appeals to his artistic judgment as fitting.

The colors are first of all divisible into two groups, the warm and the cold. Warm colors are those in which red or yellow predominate; cold colors those in which blue predominates. The warm colors tend to impart warmth to any composition in which they are employed; they cause surfaces covered with them to appear to advance or come forward in plane; they are suggestive of impetuous or instinctive action as opposed to calculative or reflective action; they are cheerful, vivacious, joyous, and relatively stimulating and exciting. The cool colors on the other hand tend to impart coldness to any composition in which they are employed; they cause surfaces covered with them to appear to retreat in plane; they are suggestive of reflective as opposed to instinctive

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action; they are calm, sober and serious, and relatively tranquillizing and depressing. The hues vary in warmth and coldness directly with their purity. Vermilion is warmer than maroon or pink, and ultramarine is colder than indigo or azure.

In addition to these group characteristics each of the primary and binary hues possesses a distinctive emotional quality, which it tends to impart to its compounds and to express in any decorative composition in which it plays a part. Although these emotional qualities were understood and employed by the great colorists of the Renaissance, they have always been regarded by the layman as matters of fancy. They were, however, confirmed scientifically during the last century by Féré, Binet, Wundt and other investigators.

Yellow, the color of light and hence of life, is the most brilliant, cheerful and exultant of the colors.

Red, the color of fire and of blood, is the warmest, most vigorous and most exciting of the colors.

Blue, the color of the starlit sky and of deep and still waters, and hence of profundity and vastness and illimitable spaces, is the coldest and the most tranquil of the colors.

Used in decoration, yellow is sunny, livable and inspiring; red is suggestive of richness, warmth, hospitality and splendor; blue of calmness, tranquillity and dignity.

Considered emotionally the three primaries, yellow, red and blue, seem not only to symbolize but also to express the cycle of human life—the exultant life of its morning, the battle and passion of its noon, the tran-

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quillity and at last the coldness of its night. In some intuitive way man seems always to have felt this, for the three hues are constantly found together in primitive art. Certain colorists of the Renaissance reduced the feeling to a formula, and held that no scheme of color could be emotionally satisfactory unless all three of the primaries appeared in it.

The binaries are compounds emotionally as well as physically. Orange, the product of two warm colors, has the potency of both. Sharing the heat of red and the light of yellow, it is the most powerful color, being when relatively pure very decorative but hot and irritating. When greatly reduced in intensity to the golden browns and tans it is warm, cheerful and unifying.

Green and violet are products of the union of warm and cold primaries, and accordingly possess qualities markedly different from those of their constituents, as a salt differs from the powerful base and acid that combine to produce it. The greens vary widely in character, being warm or cool, sunny or somber, according to the relative quantities of yellow and blue in their composition. When partly neutralized or pleasantly broken with gray, green is calm, restful and refreshing.

Violet is the color of shadows and of mystery. Violet and purple have always had a peculiar fascination for poets, esthetes and mystics; and however fanciful their extravagances it is true that these colors do possess a subtle suggestive quality—a sense of mysteries half-explored, of fires quenched but still burning—not shared by the other hues.

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Black, white and gray will be studied at some length in the chapter on light and shade. It may, however, be noted here that, used by themselves and on large areas, black can suggest only darkness and gloom, and white only a cold purity. Used together in composition, especially in small sharply-contrasted masses, they yield the same effect of concentrated activity that always results from the struggle of powerful opposites. When fused they produce neutral and characterless grays. All the grays are soft and unaggressive. True gray is as neutral emotionally as it is in color, while the tones of gray range upward toward the gentle serenity of light gray and downward toward the sobriety and melancholy of dark gray.

Black imparts solemnity to any composition in which it plays an important part. Used in small masses with other colors it serves to accent the peculiarities of the others, and thus to give an effect of concentration and vigor. White has the same power to give animation through the effect of tone contrast, and sets off the cool colors as black sets off the warm. When the cold purity of white has been banished by a little yellow, as in cream and ivory, it expresses a dignified and cheerful serenity.

The positive individual qualities of the hues vary directly with their purity. All the normal hues are powerful, bold, somewhat crude, of pronounced individuality, and obvious. They tend to lose these characteristics as they approach neutrality or are broken with gray, while at the same time they gain in quietness, subtlety and refinement. Since interior decora-

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tion is essentially a social art, and since the social qualities demand subordination of self, it is clear that pure or almost pure colors can be used infrequently, and then in very limited areas only.

All the colors vary in emotional qualities with their luminosity, or value. Light tones, like curved lines, are associated with instinctive action, while dark tones, like straight lines, are associated with reflective action. All light tones, simply as values, and apart from any qualities of the hues themselves, have a relatively exciting and exhilarating effect, while all dark tones have a contrary effect. The high values express the ideas of activity, gayety, transience, delicacy, fragility, lightness and grace; while the low values express the ideas of inactivity, sobriety, permanence, strength, weight, repose and dignity.

The use of color in decorative composition will be discussed in several of the later chapters. The student of interior decoration must, however, be alert to gather ideas helpful in color practice from every practicable source—from nature, from art, and from books. There is a considerable literature of color, and much may be learned from reading; but this reading must be done intelligently. We have seen that the study of color is made difficult by the lack of a definite system of color notation, and by the fact that one class of writers employs the theory and terminology of colored light, and another class the theory and terminology of pigments. A third source of confusion exists in the fact that most of what has been written of color practice applies primarily to the art of painting, and

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very little of it directly to the art of interior decoration.

In their use of color painting and decoration differ widely, as Professor Raymond has pointed out, both in motive and technique; and what is said about one art is accordingly only partially applicable to the other. The painter uses color in order to represent nature, while the decorator uses it for its own sake. (The most modern of the painters, who have wholly discarded representation, in effect use color as it is used in decoration.) The painter deals with small areas, which he covers with small masses of color revealing wide variation in hue and practically unlimited variation in tone. The decorator deals with large areas, covered with large masses of color, and revealing relatively few hues and a relatively limited variation in tone. One art uses chiefly the greens, grays, purples and light blues so common in nature, while the other uses chiefly the warm colors, and blue in darker rather than in lighter tones. The painter is frequently justified, in order faithfully to set forth what he sees, in introducing inharmonious colors; the decorator, who uses color for its esthetic value purely, has no such justification. Finally, the primary aim in painting is to create something which shall be beautiful in itself; while the primary aim in interior decoration is to create something which shall be beautiful in conjunction with, and as a background for, the people who use the room. Merely to state these differences is enough to emphasize the need for caution in applying to the art of interior decoration the general literature of color.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TEXTURE

**T**HE statement that form and color are the two media of decorative expression requires qualification; for texture, although in an accurate sense simply form and color interwoven, is in effect a distinct medium of expression, and one of great importance.

The word texture comes from a root meaning to weave, but its primary meaning has been so widened that the term is used in the arts to express structure, or the manner in which the parts of a material are united or interwoven. In this sense all decorative materials have texture, and their texture is the most characteristic and in some respects the most significant quality they possess. Through it form and color, essentially impersonal attributes, become individualized. Without it decoration would be meaningless and beauty impossible. Thus cinnamon brown, simply as a flat color, is uninteresting and unpleasant, being in fact little more than a dirty yellow-orange. But when it appears in an interesting texture, as in oak or walnut, in silk, wool or paper, in close or open weaves and flat or pile fabrics, it becomes significant and beautiful. Similarly the dead gloom of black and the dead

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glare of white are relieved and endowed with life and animation, as the heat of red, the cold of blue, and the brilliancy of yellow are tempered, by texture.

The esthetic value of texture lies first of all in the fact that it makes gradation of color possible. Flat colors are never beautiful. Broadly speaking, they appear neither in nature nor in good art. A flat tone is often useful in decoration, as when painted wood-work or furniture is employed to set off by contrast the gradated tones of rug, walls and hangings; but of itself it is monotonous and unbeautiful. Texture gives a surface unevenness, either actually, as in woven fabrics, flock papers, or wrought iron, or in effect, as in the grain of hardwoods, and this unevenness causes the surface color to be broken into an infinitude of minute gradations of light and shade, banishing its hard, lifeless, obvious quality, and investing it with the charm of vitality and subtlety. The importance of gradation in color is thus finely emphasized by Ruskin in the third letter of *The Elements of Drawing*: "And it does not matter how small the touch of color may be, though not larger than the smallest pin's head, if one part of it is not darker than the rest it is a bad touch; for it is not merely that the natural fact is so, that your color should be gradated; the preciousness and pleasantness of the color itself depends more on this than on any other of its qualities, for gradation is to color just what curvature is to lines, both being felt to be beautiful by the pure instinct of every human mind, and both, considered as types, expressing the law of gradual change and progress in the human soul it-

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self. What the difference is in mere beauty between a gradated and ungradated color may be seen easily by laying an even tint of rose color on paper, and putting a rose-leaf beside it. The victorious beauty of the rose as compared with other flowers depends wholly upon the delicacy and quantity of its color gradations, all other flowers being either less rich in gradation, not having so many folds of leaf; or less tender, being patched and veined instead of flushed."

Because large areas of flat color are not only tiresome and unbeautiful in themselves, but also totally unsympathetic backgrounds for the people and things that appear against them, all background surfaces should reveal a marked effect of texture. Walls and ceilings ought not to be tinted with calcimine unless they have a relatively rough surface, and when smooth walls are painted they should be covered with canvas or muslin first and stippled afterward, or otherwise roughened in order to ensure the effect of texture and the beauty of gradated tones. The great decorative value of wall paper lies largely in the fact that it makes possible almost any desired effect of texture, and this at almost any desired price. Costly papers like the grass-cloths and flocks possess great individuality and distinction in texture, while such inexpensive papers as the jaspés and imitation grass-cloths simulate it by the skillful use of dots, dashes and hair-lines of color printed upon a plain or embossed surface.

Quite apart from their hue and tone, textures possess emotional values due to the association of ideas. The decorator will accordingly seek to group textures

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with other textures, as he groups forms and colors, in such a way as to produce convergences of effect and to ensure decorative unity through likenesses either in appearance or in significance. Instinctively we associate the texture of oak with what is strong and vigorous and a little crude. Hence we group it in general not only with relatively low tones of color and relatively large and simple shapes, but also with textures which are relatively firm and heavy, as tapestry, velvet or leather. Similarly the texture of satinwood is associated by the mind with what is smooth and delicate and refined, and is therefore grouped in practice with textures like damask, brocade or taffeta, which are light, smooth and lustrous, as well as with light colors and relatively slight and graceful shapes. Instinctively the texture of silk is associated with what is rare and costly and that of cotton with what is commonplace and inexpensive, as the texture of lustrous deep-pile weaves is associated with richness and luxury and of lusterless flat weaves with a strait simplicity. Doubtless the emotional significance of texture has roots that lie below mere association, in states too purely metaphysical for discussion here. In any case it is certain that the consistent use of texture is for some reason felt to be even more essential in good decoration than consistency in ornament or style. Some textures, used together, are felt at once to be unsympathetic and even antipathetic; while others seem to be related by subtle affinities.

The choice of textures and their harmonious grouping is an important and difficult part of the decorator's

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work, and one for which no guides other than a few vague suggestions can be established. It is first of all clear that textures cannot be grouped according to their cost. Certain expensive basket weaves and block-printed Tussore silks, for example, would serve excellently as hangings in a simple living room furnished in good oak or French willow, where a far less expensive damask would be too formal; as a plain dark wood molding would serve excellently to frame an etching which, however great its cost, would be ruined by a carved gilt molding. Nor can textures always be grouped according to surface likenesses, as rough with rough and smooth with smooth. A carved oak chair, in spite of the rough and open texture of the wood, will ordinarily look better covered in a smooth pile velvet than in a rough and open-weave wool rep; as a porcelain lamp will normally look better with a shade of silk than with one of glass. Textures must in fact be grouped according to their significance, and this significance will usually be found to depend in part upon their physical characteristics and in part upon association of ideas.

Thus the formality of the damask is due to the stiffness of its weave; to its close sheen, which seems to ward off familiarities as does the polish of the diplomat or the courtier; and to the fact that it has always been associated historically with a formal style of living. The basket weave, on the other hand, and the rough texture of Tussore silk, suggest openness and informality, like a gentleman in tweeds. The fine black lines of the etching suggest precision and hardness,

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and its broad rough lines homeliness and solidity; and both of these qualities are associated in the mind with plain dark wood but not with gilded ornament. Good carving, in oak no less than in walnut or mahogany, suggests a richness which accords better with the sumptuous quality of velvet than with the rough dullness of rep. The glaze and luster of porcelain and pottery associate these materials with the idea of light, and give them a fitness for use as lamp bases not possessed by ungilded wood or wrought iron; while the softly graduated tones of thin silk seem, better than the hard brilliancy of glass, to express the soft and permeating quality of light. Thus we associate leather—unless sumptuously tooled and colored—with what is commonplace and serviceable, and gold leaf with what is pretentious and superficial. And thus we place Sèvres and bisque in the drawing room because their very texture seems to have in it something of the transient, fleeting quality of youth and gayety; and Rookwood and Grueby in the living room, along with age and strength and permanence.

In general lustrous textures are grouped with lustrous, and dull textures with dull. However, exceptions to this rule of practice will frequently be made in the use of richly-colored fabrics. Thus dull, light, or thinly-colored cretonnes will appear to better advantage with lusterless rugs of the Brussels or Scotch ingrain type than with pile fabrics. On the other hand, richly-colored cretonnes or printed linens accord excellently not only with plain or self-toned axminster or chenille rugs, but also with fine wiltons and with

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many small-figured Orientals, like the Feraghans or Serebends; provided, of course, that there is harmony in color as well as in the character or spirit of the design. Similarly, cretonnes or linens of this type may be used in a colorful room with valances made of a velvet chosen to match one of the rich colors of the pattern; whereas a linen or cretonne of meager coloring would require a valance of the same material, or of a plain material equally lusterless.

So far as its significance is concerned, texture is employed by the decorator not to express new ideas, but to affirm those expressed by form and color, and his chief concern is therefore to emphasize the decorative effects produced by form and color through the convergent effect of texture. It cannot be too often stated that in the perfect convergence of effects lies the highest charm of good decoration. Not its forcefulness and convincing quality merely, but also its atmosphere of good breeding and decorum—and it is worth noting here that this word and decoration come from a common root meaning to be fitting or becoming—are largely dependent upon the avoidance of inconsistencies and esthetic contradictions.

The appreciation of significance and beauty in texture, as in color, line and form, must be cultivated, and this can be best accomplished through a close familiarity with the various decorative materials, together with the study of their use in the great decorative periods. These periods were great precisely because in them decorative art attained to approximately perfect convergences of effects. However, each such period was

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great at the time of its maturity, not in its adolescence or its decadence, and the student must see to it that he is studying the best practice. Even in the best practice many inconsistencies will be found, as in all things human; but it was in general based upon a deep feeling for harmony in texture and a keen appreciation of its importance in decorative art.

This concludes our study of the grammar of decoration and prepares the way for the study of the problems of composition. Brief and fragmentary as this study has of necessity been, it has at any rate served to point out that everything used in the art of interior decoration is instinct with meaning. The decorator may be unaware of these meanings, as the child may be unaware of the meanings of the letters printed on his blocks; but the meanings are there nevertheless, and are quite sure to find their way into the consciousness of any one who has eyes trained to see. And whether they will group themselves into a clear and pleasant thought or strike the mind as a meaningless jumble will depend wholly upon the skill with which they are combined.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE ELEMENTS OF BEAUTY

**W**HEN the decorator, having mastered the grammar of his art and studied the architectural requirements of the room to be furnished and the needs and tastes of its occupants, sets out to make the room beautiful, he is immediately confronted by the puzzling question: What is beauty? Fitness and comfort he can ensure by the due exercise of care and common sense. But how ensure beauty, an intangible and elusive quality which he can neither define nor even recognize with assurance? How go about it to give what is at best but a vague ideal concrete expression? How make a start in the actual processes of selection and arrangement? And, seeing that what one calls beautiful another calls un-beautiful, and that indeed there seem to be no fixed standards or norms of beauty, how shall he know, when his room is finished, whether it is beautiful or not?

These considerations do not trouble the great artist, who does what he has to do, as Lord Bacon noted, "by a kind of felicity." Nor do they trouble the great number of house-furnishers who do it in the same way, minus the felicity. But to those of us who are neither

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great artists nor indifferent to beauty, and who must see the ground beneath our feet before we take a step, they are questions of the most serious importance.

If we turn to books for answers to these questions we find that writers on interior decoration have for the most part ignored them, contenting themselves either with description and illustration, or with generalities too loose to be markedly helpful in practice; while from the writers on esthetics we learn that although philosophers from Pythagoras to Croce have sought to define it, beauty is after all a quality too subtle for definition. Like electricity, or like the life-force itself, we can experience it but we cannot tell what it is.

At first thought this looks like an *impasse*. However, the case is not as bad as it looks; for while it is true that beauty is beyond definition, and that no formulas exist for its creation, it is also true that the elements of beauty, or rather the conditions under which it appears, are fairly constant. If, therefore, we can cause these conditions to be present in our rooms we can be sure that beauty, in some degree at least, will be present also. The first of these elements or conditions, the one most easily apprehensible and most nearly susceptible in practice of reduction to general statement, and the one that constitutes the essential principle of beauty in the art of interior decoration, is the imaginative or sensuous expression of unity in variety.

Simply expressed, this means that before beauty can appear in ft any work of art, whether it be a picture, a chair, or a furnished room, must consist of

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many parts; which parts, however numerous or diverse, must be so combined that they appear to concur in forming one whole. That is, they must present themselves to the mind as a unit, with a single aim, design and purpose. No bare room, no room which lacks a diversity of lines, shapes, colors and textures, of lights and shadows, of plain and ornamented surfaces, can be beautiful. Nor can any room be beautiful which, possessing this diversity, fails to fuse it into an essential unity. Conversely, no room so decorated that it reveals a stimulating degree of diversity, while at the same time its unity is perceptible instantly and without effort, can be wholly lacking in beauty.

It is therefore clear that the decorator will do well to disregard, at the outset, the more intangible and spiritual elements of beauty, which demand for their creation both imaginative power and a high degree of technical skill. These more subtle elements will come later, with the growth of creative power. At the outset it will be enough for him to arrive at principles of selection and arrangement through which the diversity of forms and colors necessarily appearing in the walls, floor and ceiling of his room, in its furniture and upholstery fabrics, its hangings, lamps, shades and pictures, can be coördinated and fused into the unity without which the room and its furnishings will be merely a congeries of unrelated parts, and as such unbeautiful. It is manifest that unity or the lack of it can be perceived only by the mind. To the nature of the mind, therefore, we must look for the solution of the problem.

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The human mind is so constituted that it can grasp but a limited number of impressions at one time. Before it can comprehend a great variety of phenomena it must divide these phenomena into classes or groups, according to some principle of order. *This principle is the arrangement of like with like.* Thus primitive man, surveying the multitude of living creatures about him, observes that some fly in the air, and these he calls birds; while others, which live in the water, crawl upon the earth, or walk upright upon four feet, he calls fish, reptiles and animals. Observing further that some of the animals eat flesh, he marks off the carnivores, which are in turn divided into genera—as the canines and felines—and finally separated into individual species. Of course his groupings will not satisfy a later science. He will call the whale a fish, and the bat a bird. But the point is that they will satisfy his mind. When things look alike, or behave in the same manner—that is, when they have the same dominant qualities—he groups them together and is satisfied. Out of this process of grouping like with like have grown all the cosmologies, religions, sciences and arts, which, however widely they may differ in content, have for their common purpose the arrangement of like with like, and the organization of the phenomena with which they are concerned, whether they be gods or butterflies, in an order of dominance and subordination.

Since the mind works this way in all things, it will work this way in its apprehension of beauty; and without venturing into the field of physiological psychology

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we may assume the fact that whenever the mind is able without difficulty to recognize easily perceptible likenesses among a relatively wide range of objects and effects seen at the same time esthetic pleasure will result. That is, the mind will in some degree, however slight, feel the thrill of beauty. If it cannot recognize such likenesses, or can recognize them only with difficulty, or if the objects and effects perceived lack diversity, esthetic pleasure will not result. Thus the mind could see no beauty, but only confusion, in a hundred straight lines and right angles drawn at random on a sheet of paper, because of the total absence of likenesses among such stimuli. Nor could it see beauty in four of these lines arranged to form a square, and six more of them arranged to form a swastika, because of the lack of variety in the effects thus presented to it. But if the entire hundred were arranged in a design of squares and swastikas and border lines to form a Greek fret, the mind, easily perceiving the resemblances in the complex whole, would call it beautiful. The fret, to be sure, would not appear to possess a high degree of beauty because of its relative lack of diversity; but it would reveal some beauty because it would constitute an imaginative expression of variety in unity, one in the manifold.

A furnished room necessarily presents to the mind of one who enters it a wide variety in form, texture, hue, tone and significance. When, surveying the varying lines and shapes in such a room, the mind is able without difficulty to recognize resemblances among them, it is more or less keenly aware of the presence of

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beauty in the room. When it also recognizes likenesses in hue and tone among a diversity of hues and tones this consciousness of beauty is intensified. And if to these purely physical stimuli be added the perception of

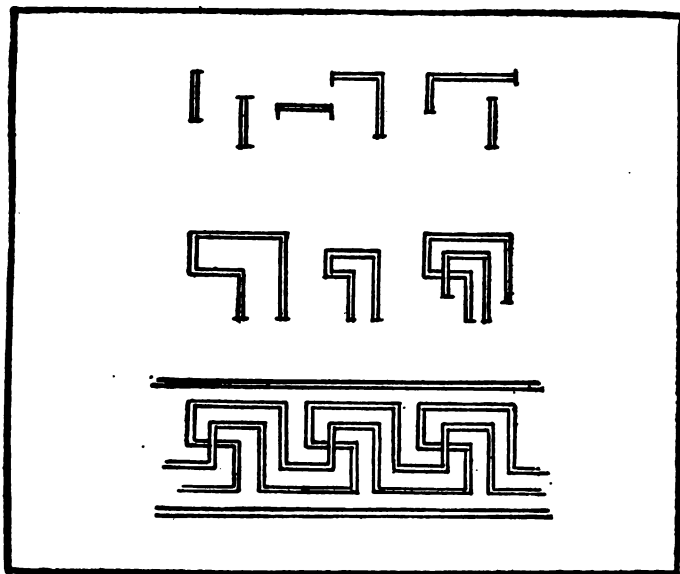


FIGURE 8.—Beauty cannot be made to appear in any composition which lacks either unity or variety. When there is variety in unity there is beauty, however slight.

like significance or emotional values—as when color and form and texture converge in the expression of an emotional idea like that of tranquillity or elegance or daintiness—the consciousness of beauty is still further heightened.

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Thus it appears that in the creation of beauty through unity in diversity the fundamental principle of composition, the basic requirement and *sine qua non* of all good work, is to ensure unity by putting together things that are alike. These like elements may of course be more or less alike. They may be exactly alike or only partially alike. They may be alike in physical appearance or in emotional significance. The degree of likeness may be perfectly obvious or exquisitely subtle. But whether obvious or subtle, it is absolutely essential to the beauty of the finished room that manifold resemblances reveal themselves among its parts, and that these resemblances be perceptible without effort; for mental effort is fatal to the perception of beauty.

Even yet there remains one step, necessitated by the mind's insistence upon the principle of subordination, and hence upon a dominant element in every composition. Wherever there is a division of parts one part must be greater than the others. Among all the colors one color must be in the ascendant. Among all the lines one type of line must make its presence in the room most strongly felt. Among several emotional ideas one idea must be most forcefully expressed. The esthetic importance of the dominant element is apparent in the earliest beginnings of art. It underlies all sound artistic practice, since it is based upon the constitution of the mind itself.

In the light of these considerations we would expect to find, as in fact we do find, that there are in practice two methods of insuring unity in the decoration of

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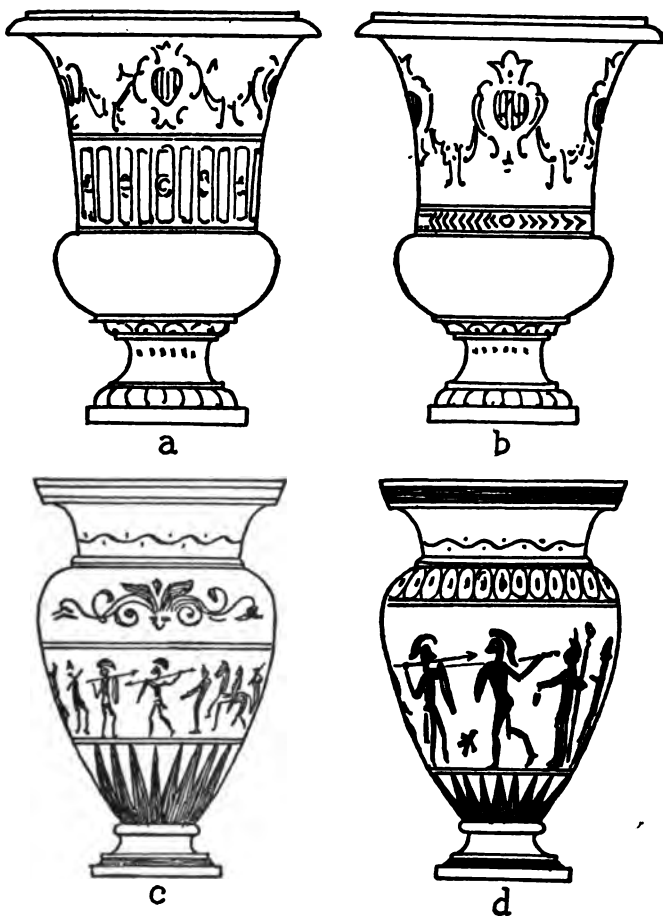


FIGURE 9.—In a and c several horizontal divisions are practically equal. In b and d this defect is corrected in such a way as to reveal clearly the presence of a dominant element. See also figures 10, 11, 12, 31. (Figures adapted from Mayeux.)



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houses. One of these methods consists essentially in putting like with like. The other consists essentially in making one element of a composition first in importance, and all other elements subordinate. We may call the first the method of repetition, and the second the method of principality. In practice they must of course be applied conjointly, so that each supplements and confirms the other.

The Craftsman chair shown in Figure 10 lacks a dominant element, since the distance from seat to top of back is the same as that from seat to floor. It possesses the unity due to constant repetition of straight lines and rectilinear shapes, but lacks diversity in line, ornamental detail, hue and tone. It appears to be substantial, enduring and well-contrived, but austere, ungraceful and uninviting. The Queen Anne chair, on the contrary, reveals the presence of a dominant element, not only in the chair as a whole, but also in the design of the individual members. This chair reveals a wide variety in line, contour, and ornamental detail, yet its important lines are all related to a dominant type—the cyma recta, or “line of beauty” curve—and hence are unifying. The chair is an excellent example of beauty due to the convergent employment of the two methods, repetition and principality.

In practice the question of principality must be settled at the outset. The decorator will first of all insure a measure of unity by choosing a motive, or dominant emotional idea, around which to build his decorative treatment. He will further insure the unity of his room by making one hue dominant by methods

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to be studied later, and by making one tone, or rather a register of closely related tones, dominant by methods to be studied in the chapter on light and shade. It is no less essential so to arrange the furniture and other



FIGURE 10.—This Craftsman chair reveals a degree of unity due to repetition of the same type of line; it lacks the unity ensured by the presence of a dominant element, as well as the diversity ensured by changes in line and ornamental detail. The English chair is free from these defects.

architectural and decorative elements of the room that a single object or group of closely related objects is made dominant. Thus the eye, confronted by a variety of shapes, sizes and ornamental motives in the room as a whole, is left in no perplexity as to the

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degree of attention due to the various elements, but rests naturally and without effort on the most important.

In a hall, or in any room where it can be kept fairly free from furniture and from competition with pictures and other counter-attractions, a rug can be made the

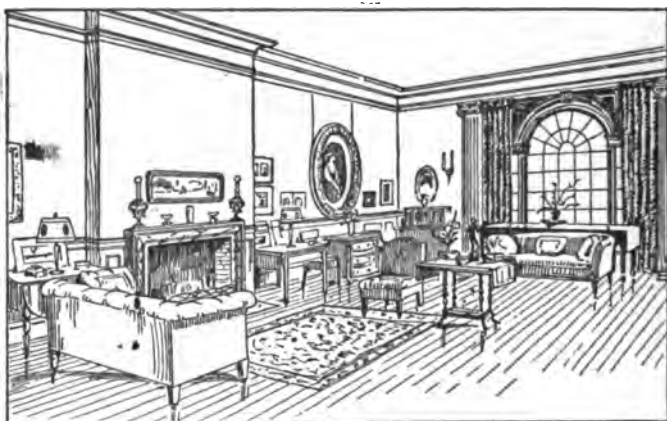


FIGURE 11.—In this room the fireplace, the large window with its curved top, supporting pilasters and heavy hangings, and the big elliptical picture make demands upon the attention so nearly equal as to rob the room of a dominant element, and hence of unity and the possibility of beauty.

dominant element of a decorative treatment. In other rooms, owing to the disposition of the mind to look for the meaning of things to the top rather than to the bottom—to the flower and not the stem; the face and not the feet—a rug cannot be made the dominant element without subjecting the whole treatment to a serious strain. Ordinarily rooms are given unity

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through principality by the fireplace with its overmantel, by a group of windows with their hangings, by a console table and mirror, a tapestry, a picture, or a reading table with its lamp and shade. In important

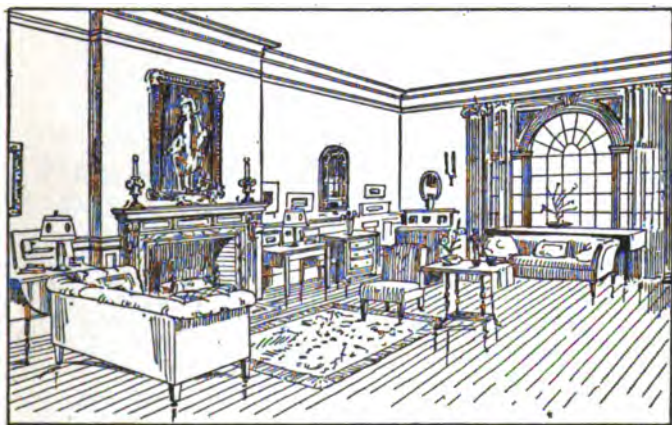


FIGURE 12.—Here the fireplace has been made clearly dominant by (a) increasing its importance through the substitution of a relatively large and striking picture; (b) decreasing the importance of the window through the substitution of thin silk curtains; (c) eliminating the elliptical picture and the substitution of a mirror. Note that the straight-line base and sides of this mirror repeat the outlines of the wall space, while its top echoes the dominant line of the window. Variations of this same curve also appear in the corners of the large picture frame and in the candlesticks placed on the mantel.

rooms the choice of the dominant feature is usually determined by the tastes of the decorator. In all rooms, whether important or otherwise, it must always be conditioned by the architecture, and particularly by the size and shape of the room and the distribution of its voids and masses. It is of course obvious that

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no decorative feature should be given principality unless it is intrinsically worthy of the attention thus forced upon it. If it is not worthy the effect of unity will have been gained at the cost of a perpetual sense of distaste.

When the dominant element has been determined the first concern of the decorator, paradoxical as the statement may seem, is to keep it from becoming too conspicuous. It is a law of the mind that, other things being equal, we must attend to the strongest stimulus; and if the dominant element is permitted to catch and hold the eye and constantly to obtrude itself upon the mind, whether by reason of its size, shape, color or position, it will inevitably shut out of consciousness the subordinate elements of the composition, which are no less essential to the beauty of the whole, since they insure the necessary effect of diversity. The dominant element must accordingly be related to the subordinate elements so cunningly that it appears to pervade the room rather than to rule over it. For example, in a small living room the fireplace, if symmetrically placed, would normally be made the dominant feature of the decorative treatment, both because of its architectural importance and because it is the cause and center of social intercourse. A relatively large fireplace, particularly if it were faced with tile or brick either lighter or darker in tone than the walls, or if it projected, with its chimney breast, for some distance into the room, would of necessity be so heavy in a decorative sense that it might very easily be made to seem over-important and destructive of the organic harmony of the

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room. Therefore any marked increase in its importance, caused, let us say, by the addition of a paneled over-mantel, a large and conspicuous picture or mirror,

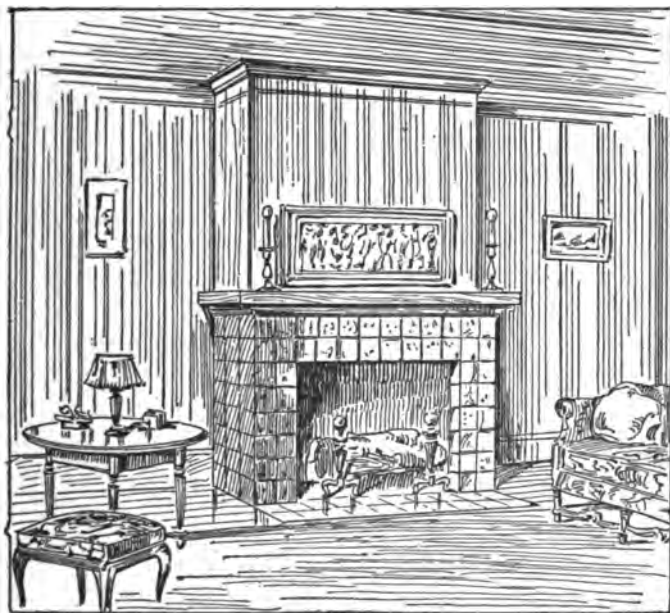


FIGURE 13.—The very marked projection of the fireplace and the effect of weight produced by its tile facing render the use of striking accessories on the over-mantel unwise.

or of a number of vases, easel pictures, or other objects of striking outline and pronounced coloring, would mar the decorative balance and imperil the beauty of the room. Accordingly he would doubtless find it desirable to confine the embellishment of such a mantel

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to a few small objects—three, say, or at the most five—  
or to a plastic frieze toned to analogy if not to identity  
with the wall. On the other hand, a smaller fireplace



FIGURE 14.—The comparatively slight projection of this fireplace and its general effect of lightness warrant the addition of an important element to the over-mantel.

in the same room, or the same fireplace in a larger room, might require to have its importance as the dominant element emphasized in the treatment of the over-mantel either by larger and more ornate shapes or more striking coloring, or both.

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While the subject will be discussed at length in the chapter on the dominant hue, we may note in this connection that a given hue may be made first in importance by either of two methods. One method is to make all the important hues appearing in the room blood-relations by a process of infusion, technically called keying, in which the dominant hue appears as a constituent of all the other hues. Thus in a scheme of orange, yellow and green the decorator might use light golden brown walls, antique ivory ceiling, olive carpet, olive and gold hangings trimmed with old gold, écru curtains, soft yellow lamp shades, nut-brown furniture and woodwork, and olive, brown and gold furniture coverings. Here all the hues would be keyed to yellow, and the unity of the treatment would be ensured by the predominance of that element. Such a color scheme, as we shall see later, would require to be vivified by a note of the complementary color; but this requirement does not affect the general principle involved.

The second method is to cover two-thirds or more of all the decorative surfaces of the room with tones of the hue, depending upon its complementary, helped out by small accents of other harmonious colors, for the necessary variety. When either method is skillfully employed the dominant hue, as it appears in relatively neutral tones in the background surfaces of the room, unifies the whole decorative treatment while permitting a wide variety among the subordinate elements. In a particularly happy way it realizes the ideal of principality through pervasion rather than



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ascendancy, since it permits the mind to follow its natural inclination to concern itself with the positive factors of its environment—that is, with the objects in the room—while at the same time the unifying element lies at the back of consciousness.

In the effort to acquire a sure taste for effects of unity, principality in form must be studied carefully and should be studied progressively, beginning with the simplest leaf and flower forms, wherein may be noted the way in which one part of a leaf is dominant, and one leaf in a spray of leaves. Simple examples of principality are found in the anthemion motive, in the volutes of Ionic capitals, in vases and pottery. More complex examples are afforded by many Persian rugs, in which the lanceolate ellipse of the medallion, reënforced by analogous lines in the corner pieces and the inner medallion, dominates the whole composition. In many of the Gothic cathedrals a single spire dominates the whole edifice and gives it unity, as does the dome of the Capitol at Washington.

By the method of repetition unity is insured through the recurrence of identical or more or less similar lines, shapes, hues, tones, textures, and proportions. The method can be applied to any room, under any conditions, and may be made to yield an effect either marked or slight, obvious or subtle, according to the manner in which it is employed. The unifying and esthetically pleasurable effect of repetition has a double basis. It is in part physiological, and is due to the fact that the perception of like or repeated elements involves little muscular effort, whereas the perception of unlike

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elements necessitates a constant movement and adjustment of the eye. Psychologically, repetition is associated in the mind with the ideas of succession, order and regularity, and hence with the sense of repose and quiet well-being which always results from order and regularity in the affairs of life. On the other hand, change and non-succession are associated with the ideas of disorder, irregularity and disquietude. Thus the recurrence of similar lines and shapes, as in the repetition of a pleasing ornamental motive or the mechanical repetition of an inconspicuous pattern on the walls or floor, affects the mind, as does the recurrence of musical cadences or the rhythmic repetition of rhymed syllables, with a sense of quietude, order, and calm unity.

In good decoration the method of repetition is employed in three forms: (a) in its simplest and most common form, as repeating diaper pattern, which is used in wall papers, in damasks, tapestries and other drapery and upholstery stuffs, in all-over carpets and in many ornamental plaster ceilings, to cover entire surfaces with the same motive repeated continuously; (b) in its most obvious form, as symmetrical repetition, wherein each color, outline or mass on one side of a real or ideal center is balanced by a like color, outline or mass on the other side; and (c) in its most subtle form, as the recurrence, in many and often in widely separated parts of a composition, of identical or similar lines, shapes, colors or significances.

The use and decorative value of diaper pattern will be discussed in the chapters on proportion and excellence in design, while symmetry will be studied in the

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chapter on balance. This latter form of repetition has a marked unifying power. Because the like elements lie immediately before the eye, symmetry makes it easier for us to see and grasp the significance of things than is possible in non-symmetrical arrangements of decorative features. Thus a pair of identical candlesticks, placed at equal distances from the center of a mantel, would have an effect upon the mind at once unifying and obvious. Symmetrical repetition, whether it appears in the two halves of the same unit, as in a chair, a rug, or a window hung with draperies, or in arrangements of several units as groups, as in the case of a console table with a mirror above it and identical chairs at equal distances from either end, is never subtle. Its effect is always obvious and always formal, and when over-emphasized, as may very easily happen, it results in over-formality and stiffness.

The use of recurring lines and shapes and echoed colors lies at the basis of all fine work in interior decoration, as in architecture and the other visual arts. The constant repetition of similar combinations in both outline and ornament constitutes a large part of the charm of what we call the period styles. In the nature of things it must constitute a large part of the charm of any beautiful room, since, as we have seen, it provides one of the conditions in the absence of which beauty cannot be made to appear. Thus the repetition of similar straight lines, as in the architecture and decoration of Craftsman houses, makes for unity; and so, far more subtly, does the repetition of identical or similar curves.

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For example, the cabriole legs found in Louis XV, Dutch, and Queen Anne furniture, and in many fine Chippendale pieces, and illustrated in Figure 10, are based on the cyma recta, or line of beauty curve, and in a room in which important pieces of furniture of this type are used a subtle effect of unity in variety can be produced by repeating variations of this same curve in the outline or ornamental details of lambrequins, mirror tops, lighting fixtures, lamps, candlesticks, vases, mantel clocks, andirons and firescreens; in the legs and finials of bookcase, desk or cabinet; in the border stripes of rugs, the seats and backs of chairs, the molding of cornice, trim and picture frames. Of course this does not mean that this curve must appear in all these situations. In fact, as will be developed in the chapter on Contrast, over-emphasis of any type of line, however pleasing in itself, results in monotony and the loss of decorative charm. What it does mean is that the curve must be repeated a good many times and in various situations in order to yield a marked yet subtle effect of unity, and that, within reasonable limits, every such repetition will add to the mind's pleasure.

In the same way the elliptical medallion of a rug may be repeated in an elliptical table, in a mirror, in chair-backs, vases, lamps, candlesticks, small easel pictures, ferneries or tea tables; and suggested more or less definitely by such features as the arc of a half-elliptical wall table, the tops of book-blocks, or the defining curves of valances or tied-back draperies. The oval of many Hepplewhite chair-backs may be

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echoed in bowls, lamps, Italian candlesticks, andirons, bellows, in a lamp surmounted by a mushroom shade, in the echinus or egg and dart molding. A round dining table may be related to an oblong dining room by means of an oblong rug with a rounded elliptical medallion, by hangings or a frieze having a pattern based on the circle or hexagon, by a round bowl of flowers, a round Sheffield tray, a Lazy Susan, or by the wheels of a tea wagon. Similar triangles may appear in pediments, lamp shades or mantel clocks, as well as in groupings of furniture and small decorative objects; and similar oblongs in ceilings, wall spaces, windows, doors, rugs, table tops, pictures or books.

The repetition of color is absolutely essential. Each important hue must be recalled, once at least and often many times, in small masses and in more or less widely varying tones throughout the room. Because of the direct appeal of color the mind finds a peculiar pleasure in the progressive recognition of color likenesses, and will accept no excuse for their absence. Thus when the hue dominant in the hangings is found to be echoed in many parts of the rug, in the table runner, furniture coverings, screens, the trimming of lamp shades, in cushions, potteries, pictures, book bindings and flowers, the mind, successively perceiving the likenesses as the eye turns from one view of the room to another, is filled with an increasing delight.

In all good work the decorator will of course repeat both form and color, extending the process to include both material likenesses, as in the repetition of shapes, colors, textures and ornamental motives, and likenesses

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in significance, as in the employment of shapes and colors which affect the mind in the same way. Likenesses in emotional value or significance confirm and vitalize the purely physical resemblances, and make powerfully yet subtly for artistic unity. Thus we cannot say that an overstuffed davenport and a big, low-toned rug look alike, except as they reveal likenesses in hue or tone; but it is certainly true that they similarly affect the mind, and are accordingly unifying when used together in composition. The creation of these convergences of expression is an urgently important part of the decorator's work, and the artistic aims and processes involved will be discussed in several of the later chapters.

While the mere presence of recurring elements, of whatever sort, tends to unify any decorative composition, it is clear that this tendency will be the more marked in the degree (a) that the like elements approach identity; (b) that like elements in both form and color are repeated convergently; and (c) that these like elements are so placed as to make their likenesses immediately apparent to the eye.

Order is the basic esthetic quality, and orderly arrangements are most pleasing and convincing. Effects of parallelism, in which analogous lines or forms, or varying tones of a given hue are arranged in series, whether vertically, horizontally or obliquely, are as essential to good work in decoration as they are in architecture or painting.

The unity of a decorative treatment will be at once most strongly and most subtly emphasized by so com-

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binning the methods of principality and repetition that the dominant element in the room is made the focus or point of departure for the important or characteristic lines and colors used throughout the room, as the dominant member of each subordinate group of related objects is made the focus for the important lines and colors of the other members of the group.

As illustrating this principle, let us consider that a drawing room is to have as its dominant element a Georgian fireplace, and that the over-mantel of this fireplace is to be embellished with a mirror and a pair of vases. Assuming that a rectangular mirror would resemble the space it was to adorn so closely as to be obvious and inartistic, while an elliptical mirror would be so strikingly unlike the space in outline as not to seem an organic part of the fireplace group, we might compromise upon a triptych mirror in antique gold, having a rectangular base and a half elliptical top, and place near either end of it an elliptical vase in cornflower blue. To set up an effect of parallelism we could use a firescreen having a similar rectangular base supported by half-elliptical feet, and a top line which repeated the top curve of the mirror; while the method could be extended by the use of a rug having a running vine border or an elliptical medallion center, or both. The parallelism would of course be repeated in color by using in both rug and screen more or less blue of the same hue but different in tone and purity—say, navy blue in the rug and gentian blue in the screen.

In the case of a subordinate group in the same room, to be formed, for example, by a console table between

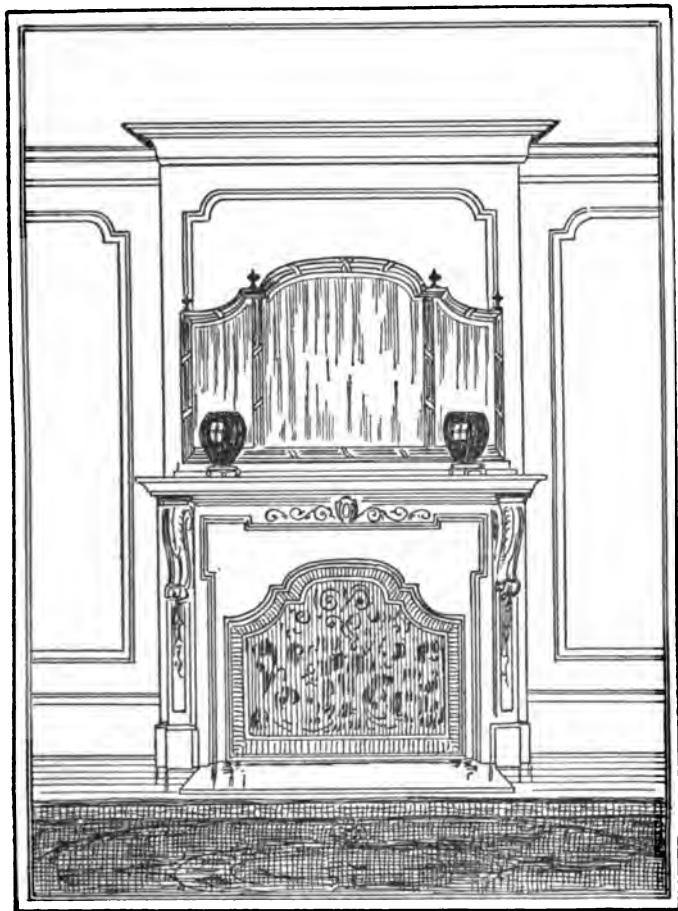


FIGURE 15.—The same type of curve is repeated in many situations, thus adding unity through repetition to unity through principle in the composition of the dominant element.

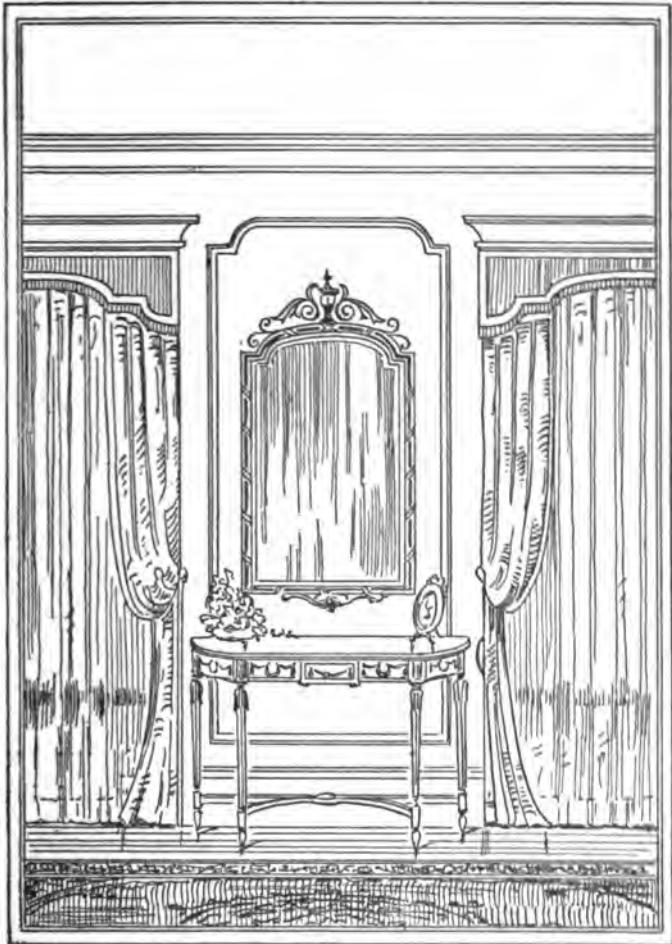


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two windows, we might use full length hangings caught back by a collar in such a way as to describe with their inner lines quarter-elliptical curves, and a lambrequin or valance in the design of which curved lines adapted from the arc of an ellipse were freely employed. The table, too, would be half-elliptical. The wall space might be adorned by an elliptical mirror, by a painting having the middle of the frame at the top carved into a half-elliptical ornamental motive, or by an old brocade or damask with a large elliptical vase on the table in front of it. The same processes would be applied to the selection and arrangement of subordinate members of the group, and to the coloring; provided, of course, that the processes of repetition stopped short of the point where the effect ceased to be subtle and interesting and became monotonous and tiresome.

Inasmuch as we are here concerned with the general principle only and not with its application, it is unnecessary to carry this idea further, or to point out the many ways in which the two methods of insuring unity are interwoven in practice, so that principality in color is affirmed by repetition both of form and color, and principality in form is affirmed by repetition both of color and form, until the mind is conscious of a multitude of resemblances, and only the elements required for contrast are unrelated to the rest. The thing is obviously simple. And yet, simple as it is, it lies at the basis of all decorative art and of all art, and within a hand's breadth of the secret of beauty.

It must be remembered that in the perception of



**FIGURE 16.**—The type of line announced in the dominant element is repeated in a subordinate group.

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beauty the mind is at play. It cannot be forced, and is in fact curiously childlike. If a child is given a picture puzzle and finds the solution too easy he loses interest at once; if he finds it too difficult he tosses the puzzle away and turns to something else. The likenesses of line, form, color and significance designed by the decorator to produce an effect of unity, and thus to make beauty possible, must not be too obvious, nor must they be obscure. For example, if upon a relatively high and narrow wall space a relatively long and narrow rectangular mirror be hung—assuming, for the purposes of this illustration, that it is hung alone, and not above another piece of furniture—the likenesses in the two forms in both outline and proportion will be instantly perceptible, being the more obvious in the degree that the mirror approaches identity with the wall space in size and in the ratio of width to length. If a long and narrow elliptical mirror be substituted, the mind, in spite of the difference in outline, will at once recognize the likeness in proportion, and may easily find pleasure in the increasing subtlety of the resemblance. In the case of a circular mirror the mind will instantly perceive the total dissimilarity in both outline and proportion, and will accept the contrast for what it may be worth in the decorative total of the room. But if a short, wide mirror be used—that is, if the axis of the one first used be reversed—there will be perplexity and displeasure; first, because the eye must suddenly reverse its direction in order to see both forms, and this takes time and breaks the rhythm unpleasantly, and, sec-

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ondly, because the mind must suddenly change from the idea of vertical to that of horizontal extension, and is thus conscious of unlikeness in significance at the same time that it slowly becomes aware that both forms are oblongs. This fact, that likenesses to be esthetically pleasurable must be neither too easy nor too hard to see, largely conditions beauty of proportion, and will be discussed in the chapter dealing with that topic.

On the other hand, it must be remembered that likenesses by no means imply identity, and that in the degree that one's taste is cultivated and his mind enriched by knowledge of the field of ornament and design he will reject the obvious and find pleasure in the subtle. The old-fashioned parlor set has been banished, not because it was inherently unfitting and ugly, but rather because its constant repetition of the same elements was esthetically unstimulating and tiresome, just as the ceaseless iteration of a single musical phrase, which is enough to satisfy primitive man, gives place with advancing culture to complex harmonies, varying rhythms, and delicate *nuances* of expression.

It is therefore clear that the power to perceive and enjoy decorative resemblances will vary with each individual, and that for this reason the decorator must be concerned even in this most elusive quality of beauty with considerations of fitness. A cultivated taste will perceive subtle correspondences imperceptible by the uncultivated, and to each must be offered such things as he can see. To the scientist palm and pine are alike, and a single fossil bone is enough to reveal

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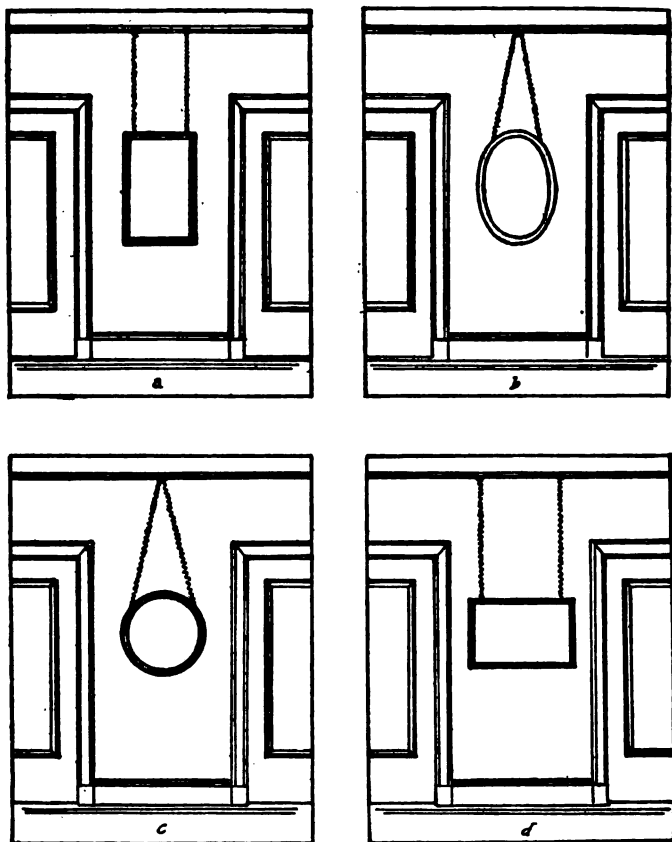


FIGURE 17.—(a) Likeness in both outline and proportion; (b) likeness in proportion but not in outline; (c) unlikeness in both proportion and outline; (d) likeness in outline, obscured and made esthetically unpleasant by unlikeness in proportion.

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complete a creature that perished unnumbered ages ago. The world of ornament, like the world of nature, is an enormous complex in which many widely varying forms are in some way, however distant and obscure, related; and of these relations one man will see more than another. To the one the interlacing vines and leaves of an old Gothic tapestry, copied and used to cover the chair in which he sits, may have nothing in common with the stiff, crudely branching form that appears in the Beloochistan rug before his hearth; but to another the symbolism of the tree forms in each makes them alike, and together they carry his fancy backward, past Druid rites, past Norse mythology, past Chaldea and Babylon, past the Garden of Eden itself, to the dim beginnings of religion, where a potent goddess lived in the roots of a tree and gave forth life to all the world.

Without variety in unity, one in the manifold, there can be no beauty in decoration. Unity alone means monotony and *ennui*; variety alone means confusion and fatigue. But though variety and unity must appear together in the same decorative treatment, they need not appear in the same degree and they can in fact appear only in inverse proportions. To increase the effect of either is to diminish correspondingly that of the other. This is of course true of all the arts. Increasing complexity and richness must always be paid for in diminishing simplicity and force. The clearness of the aria is lost in the intricacies of the fugue. King Lear is richer than the Antigone, and Faust is richer than Lear; but the irresistible march

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of the Greek tragedy is impeded in the English, and all but lost in the German.

In periods of bad decorative art diversity is emphasized to the total neglect of the requirements of unity, and in periods of reaction from bad art unity is likely to be emphasized to the total neglect of the requirements of diversity. In a general way, esthetic pleasure seems to increase with the increasing complexity of the stimuli until the point is reached where unity is lost, and complexity degenerates into confusion. Thus there is an inevitable tendency toward increasing complexity, as from Doric to Alexandrian architecture, or from the Dutch splat chair back to the ribbon back of Chippendale. After the point of confusion has been passed—often long after—a reaction sets in, simpler ideas are restored, and the long process begins all over again. Sometimes this reaction is gentle, as when Louis XV decoration was supplanted by that of Louis XVI, and sometimes it is violent. Decadent classicism gives way to primitive Christianity, and the excesses of the Cavaliers are succeeded by the austerities of Puritanism.

The rooms of thirty years ago were for the most part unbeautiful because they were filled with diversities in form and color to the total neglect of any principle of likeness and subordination. On the other hand, our Craftsman rooms, with their exclusively plain surfaces, meager colors, and unornamented straight-line furniture, are for the most part unbeautiful because they neglect the variety equally essential to beauty.

Between these two extremes there is, however, oppor-

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tunity for a wide range of variation in relative emphasis, and here, as everywhere, we must be guided in practice by considerations of fitness to purpose. Relative emphasis upon the unity or the diversity of a decorative treatment affects us emotionally, the former inducing a feeling of repose, the latter of animation and cheerfulness. These states, which have bases at once physical, intellectual and emotional, are directly and strongly affected by the home environment, and are accordingly in a very considerable measure under the control of the decorator. They are manifestly antithetical, the one implying restfulness and tranquillity, the other animation and buoyancy. Each is essential to the well-being of all normal persons, and both can of course exist coincidentally, but only in inverse proportions. When the intensity of either is increased that of the other is diminished, as one scale of a balance must go up when the other is weighted down. The decorator must accordingly see to it that where in the decoration of a given room repose is the first consideration his emphasis is placed upon unity, and that where cheerfulness or gayety is the first consideration the emphasis is placed upon variety. It will be obvious, of course, that in general the complexity and strain of modern life make emphasis of the quality of repose desirable in all rooms to be occupied continuously for any length of time. Tired nerves are rested, depleted vitality restored, and efficiency increased by it. In the average family of socially inclined, sport-loving, theater-going people there is more danger in over-emphasis of variety than of unity. Moreover, the decorator



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must always remember that he has many resources at his command, and that it would be bad practice artistically to over-use any one of them. Effects of repose, as we have seen, may be produced by the emphasis of horizontal extension; by the use of cool colors, of low tones of any hues, and of closely related colors; by reducing the number of objects, shapes and colors in a room; by increasing the degree of likeness characterizing these objects, shapes and colors; and by emphasizing the importance of the dominant element. The same wealth of resources is available for the expression of any other motive. Thus there is opportunity for the widest play of individual fancy. A room need not be bare in order to be restful or restrained, or crowded with ornament to be cheerful.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE LAW OF CONTRAST

**W**E have seen that beauty springs from unity in diversity, and that unity results from processes of comparison wherein like is placed with like—like lines, or shapes, or colors, or significances—until the multiplicity of individual units is related to a few types, and of these types one becomes dominant. Yet, though this conforms to the law of its being, the mind, like a child at play, quickly tires of the same old types. It will return to them; it must know all the time that they are there; but for the moment its interest can be retained only by showing it something different.

Contrast, as an artistic principle, is the result of this necessity. It is a means of giving zest to decorative compositions which, however harmonious, would without it be insipid. It opposes curved lines to straight, plain surfaces to ornamented, light tones to dark, and warm colors to cold, and by this opposition gives the charm of vividness to each.

In this, of course, artistic practice merely conforms to the general law of life, since all our states, both physical and emotional, are intensified by contrast. Sunshine always seems more brilliant after shadow, tran-

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quillity more grateful after excitement. It is indeed only through contrast that we can discriminate between one state or emotion and another. We can enjoy warmth only because we have known cold, and rest because we have known effort. We perceive form or outline only where there is a contrast of hue or tone. We know smooth textures through contrast with rough, and warm colors through contrast with cold; while lines, shapes and colors are set off and their peculiar qualities made more marked through contrast with their opposites.

It happens, therefore, that in the effort so to select and arrange the furnishings of a given room as to make the room beautiful, the esthetic problem of the decorator is twofold. He must first of all ensure an easily perceptible unity through principality and the repetition of like elements, and he must also invest his room with a quality of interest and decorative charm through the opposition of contrasting elements. The contrasts chiefly employed will be those of hue, in which hues more or less markedly unlike are used together; of tone, in which relatively light tones are opposed to relatively dark; of purity, in which relatively pure colors are opposed to relatively neutral; of textures; of lines; of shapes; and of ornamented surfaces as opposed to plain.

Besides its esthetic importance, contrast appears in decoration as a physical factor, the operation of which is to make unlike elements seem more unlike. It is in the nature of our perceptive faculties that when unlike things are compared their unlikeness is accentuated.

## The Law of Contrast

ated. When we see a tall chair and a low chair in the same group the tall one appears to be taller than it really is, and the short one still shorter by contrast. A picture hung in the midst of a large wall space seems smaller than it would if hung in a small space; a long room appears longer if it is also narrow; a round mirror on a rectangular wall space is more

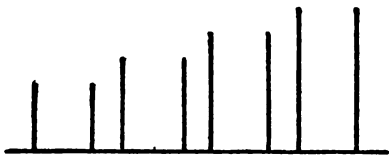


FIGURE 18.

striking than a rectangular mirror would be; pale colors appear more pale against darker grounds; hues more intense against their complementaries; and a richly figured drapery fabric gains in emphasis and distinction from being hung against a plain wall fabric.

Figures 18 and 19, taken from Lipp's *Raumaesthetik und geometrisch-optische Täuschungen*, illustrate this physical effect of contrast. In the first figure the first and second lines are of equal length, as are the third and fourth, and the fifth and sixth; yet the second appears to be distinctly shorter than the first, and the fourth distinctly

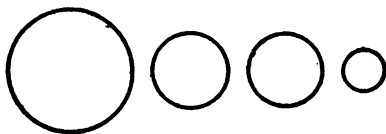


FIGURE 19.

shorter than the third. In the second figure the two mean circles are of the same diameter, but through contrast with the two extremes the second is made to appear smaller than the third.

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Like phenomena appear constantly in decoration. Whenever the treatment of a room is so arranged that the eye makes a comparison of similar lines of different lengths, or of similar shapes of different sizes, their apparent differences are increased by the contrast. Dining chairs placed against a vertically paneled wall appear lower and more squat by reason of the contrast between the lines of their backs and those of the paneling; small tables look even smaller in a big room, as do small rugs on a large floor space; a bookcase, highboy, chest of drawers or piano will appear wider in a narrow space, narrower in a wide space; taller in a room with a low ceiling, and shorter in a room with a high ceiling.

For the same reason, whenever one dimension of a room or of any object is emphasized, the other dimensions are apparently diminished. A narrow bookcase, cabinet or chair appears to be taller than a wide piece of the same actual height, as a couch without a back seems to be longer than a high-backed settee of the same actual length. The practical importance of these considerations, which will be developed at length in the chapter on Proportion, lies in the fact that beauty and fitness in decoration are so largely dependent upon the apparent—as opposed to the actual—relationships in size and shape among the elements of a composition; and inasmuch as contrast is sure to change the apparent relationships in some degree the decorator must be prepared to foresee and allow for these changes.

Colors, even more than shapes, are affected by contrast. Color practice is in fact immensely complicated by the fact that a color is never seen by itself, but al-

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ways in relation to other colors. These other colors react upon it, altering in some degree its appearance both in hue and in tone. Chevreul set forth the general principle involved in the formula: When the eye sees at the same time two contiguous colors, they will appear as dissimilar as possible, both in optical composition and in height of tone.

The changes effected by contrast in altering the height of tone of juxtaposed colors is illustrated by Figure 20. Here the small inner squares are all of exactly the

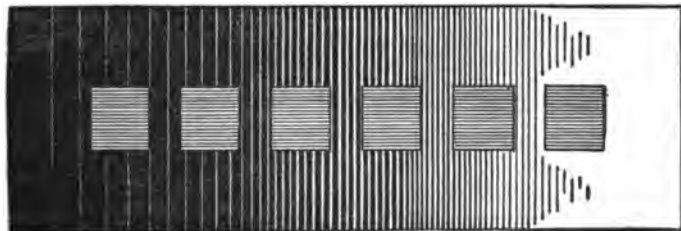


FIGURE 20.

same tone of gray, but they appear to grow progressively darker as the outer surfaces grow progressively lighter. The same phenomena appear when dark pictures or hangings are placed against light walls, or when light rugs are placed on a darker floor. Moreover they appear whether the juxtaposed surfaces are in tones of neutral gray, in tones of the same hue, or in tones of different hues, as when a light red pillow is placed against a dark blue sofa. In the latter case, however, there is a double effect. Not only will the red appear lighter and the blue darker in tone, but each

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hue will also appear to be slightly tinged with the complementary of the other. That is, the red will be slightly tinged at the point of contact with orange, and the blue with green.

This phenomenon, which is called simultaneous contrast and is described and illustrated in every good text-book on optics, is of less importance in decoration than in painting, because the decorative areas are larger and the textures coarser. Nevertheless it is sufficiently important to require careful study and constant watchfulness in practice. It may be observed by placing small squares of colored paper against differently colored backgrounds, or by means of lengths of plain drapery fabrics. If a piece of orange-colored velvet, for example, be held against successive backgrounds of black, white, ultramarine and green, it will seem to change color slightly with each background. Against black it will appear not only lighter but more golden, because the lighter or yellow element in its composition is more strongly accentuated by tone contrast than is the darker or red element. Against white it will appear both darker and more red, for the opposite reason. Against its complementary blue it gains in purity and brilliancy, and against green it becomes more reddish in hue, because it is tinged by the complementary of the green ground. Thus when red and blue are juxtaposed the red tends toward orange-red and the blue toward green-blue; yellow and green tend respectively toward orange-yellow and bluish green; green and blue toward yellowish-green and purple; and so on. When

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true complementary hues are juxtaposed each is made more brilliant by the contrast.

What is true of the spectrum colors is true of all their derivatives formed with black, gray and white, in direct proportion to the amount of white light in the color. Very light broken tones impart their complementaries more strongly than do darker tones, and are accordingly better adapted for the production of brilliant or elusive color effects. Simultaneous contrast is most marked when the two hues are in about the same tone. When dark colors are used with light the effect of simultaneous contrast is very slight. Contrast both in hue and in height of tone is made very much less marked by the use of materials of rough surface, coarse texture, or conspicuous design.

In discussing tone contrast it is of course to be remembered that tones, as we have defined the word, are simply measures of relative light and darkness, the idea of hue or color proper being abstracted. We are not in this connection concerned with correct hue relationships, but with correct tone relationships, which is an entirely different matter. Thus it often happens that a color contrast entirely satisfactory as far as the hues are concerned is inharmonious because of bad tone contrast. A dull gold cushion on a dark blue davenport would be pleasing; a cushion of pale maize or primrose would not be.

Tone contrast is a factor of very great importance in interior decoration. Necessarily an element in every decorative problem, it must be carefully studied and



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skillfully employed. When so employed it becomes a source of beauty; when otherwise employed a source of discord and unrest. Nowhere in the art do we find a stronger confirmation of the statement that good decoration is not absolute but relative, and that the essential thing is correct relationship; for it constantly happens that a color, pleasing in itself, is so changed in tone by contiguous colors that it becomes unpleasing. The pastel or water color that blends restfully into the background of a soft gray wall will seem to start violently from a dark wall. The low-toned Kurdistan rug that rests as peacefully upon a dark floor as if it had grown there will ruin the repose of any room in which it is placed upon a floor of light yellow oak or maple.

Contrast of tone, like contrast of line, form or hue, is essential in good decoration because it helps to ensure the diversity without which beauty is impossible. Thus tone contrast is necessary between floor and wall, wall and ceiling, background and ornament, and between the structural and non-structural parts of a room. It is however a serious mistake to make these contrasts too marked, since they inevitably tend to arouse a sense of activity and hence to be destructive of repose. Many rooms have been spoiled by too sharp contrast between floor and wall, and many more by too sharp contrast between wall and ceiling—the latter defect being very common by reason of the widespread but erroneous idea that the ceiling must always be either white or a pale cream, regardless of the tone of the walls.

Bad tone contrast appears most frequently, however,

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and in the form most destructive of repose and beauty, in sharp contrasts between small masses, or between a small and a large mass. The motive in carpet or wall paper which is markedly lighter or darker than its background, and therefore appears to stand out in a definite effect of relief; the ebony piano against putty-colored walls, or the large mahogany dresser against pearl or pale French gray; pale-tinted cushions against dark, heavy upholstered furniture; dark verdure tapestry papers in a frieze above white paneled walls—these and a multitude of like offenses against harmonious tone relationships are constantly to be met with.

Monotone is tiresome, and to normal persons unendurable. The eye is never satisfied unless the visual field presents a diversity of tones. However, it must first of all be an orderly diversity, as otherwise the effect would be so incoherent that the mind could recognize essential tonal likenesses only with a sense of effort. Disorder is never an esthetic quality, but is rather the most fecund source of ugliness. If, in order to demonstrate this fact experimentally, one will take five small oblongs of plain neutral gray, say one by two inches in size, and varying progressively in tone from dark to light, and will place these oblongs side by side in every possible combination, it will be found that the only esthetically pleasing arrangement is one in which the tones vary progressively from one extreme to the other. Thus the eye is able to take in the whole series with the least effort, and the mind judges of the nature of each tone, perceives without effort the elements of likeness, and is content.

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Orderly tone relationships give atmosphere and coherence and organic unity to a decorative treatment, and are as much as any other single factor responsible for its beauty and charm. In the treatment of background surfaces this orderly arrangement will work upward in an ascending scale, from the floor through the walls to the ceiling. Rooms in which this order is reversed by using darker tones on the walls and ceiling and lighter tones on the floor have in general a top-heavy and disturbing appearance, because the mind through age-long processes of association has come instinctively to regard dark-colored forms and surfaces as heavier in weight than light-colored forms and surfaces. Accordingly it wants to see the darker masses below the horizontal center of the room for the sake of stability, with the darkest at the base; and the lighter masses above the horizontal center for the sake of buoyancy and lightness, with the lightest at the top. Thus in a carefully furnished room the three background surfaces, floor, walls and ceiling, constitute three distinct zones, each characterized by a dominant tone quality. Within each of these zones there may be in good work wide contrast both in hue and in purity. There ought not, however, to be any very wide contrasts in tone, and in general we may say that the less the tranquillity of the zone atmosphere is broken by contrasts of tone, beyond the minimum essential to the proper outline and emphasis of form, the greater will be the chance of beauty in the room.

✓In practice the tranquillity of the floor zone will be disturbed by the use of a carpet or rug having a dark

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ground with light ornamental motives or a light ground with dark motives; by a dark rug on a light floor or a light rug on a dark floor, with the effect strikingly intensified, of course, when several small rugs are used; and by the use of light furniture and upholstery fabrics on a dark floor covering or the converse. Similarly the tranquillity of the wall zone will be disturbed by the use of very light walls with dark surbase or dado, trim, or fireplace, or the converse; or by dark hangings, pictures, cabinets or heavy chairs, or even small decorative accessories against markedly light walls, or the converse; while dark beams against a very light ceiling will have the same unesthetic result. This does not mean that tone contrasts within a given zone must be reduced to the extreme minimum; but it does mean that such contrasts must be reduced, both in number and in intensity, to the point where effects of spottiness are eliminated, and the essential tone unity of the zone is instantly apparent.

It is to be noted that contrast can give interest, zest and animation through the opposition of unlike elements either irregularly and as it were capriciously, in which case it serves merely to accent or give snap, or regularly and rhythmically, in which case the contrast itself becomes an element of unity in the composition of the room. A simple illustration is afforded by the case of blue and gold draperies. These colors contrast sharply, both in hue and tone, and when used together they are certain to give an effect of snap and animation, the intensity of the effect depending on the purity of the hues and the area of the contrasting sur-

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faces. In a blue and gold damask or velvet these colors are combined in a repeating design, and the regular and

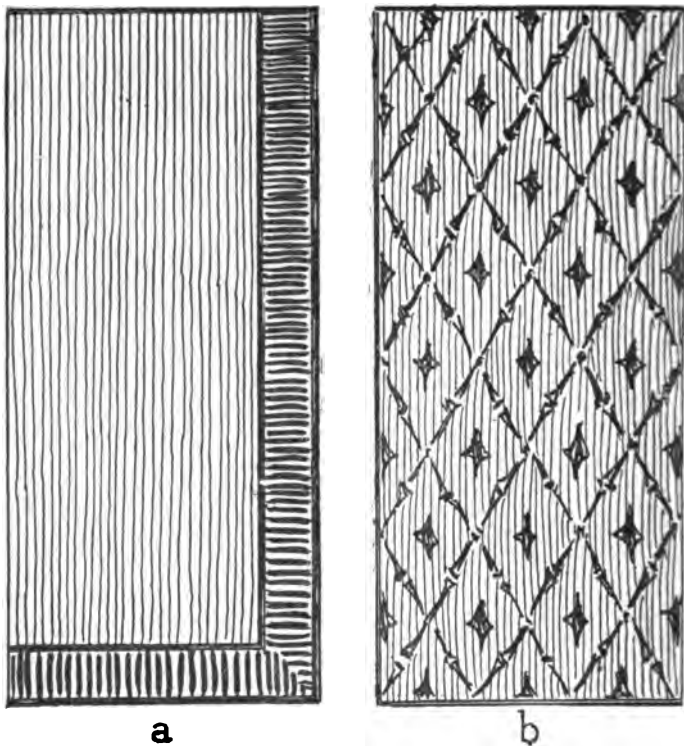


FIGURE 21.—(a) Sharp contrast, serving merely to accent and define; (b) same contrast rhythmically repeated, and therefore unifying.

rhythmic recurrence of the same combinations of the two hues constitutes not only a contrast, but a powerful

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unifying factor in the room. If on the other hand plain blue hangings are trimmed with a gold galloon, or if plain gold hangings are outlined with a gimp or fringe of blue, the contrast serves merely as an accent. Of course this plain blue fringe would in practice be made to repeat a blue in the rug, or in some other important element on or near the floor, thus serving to unify the general scheme; but so far as the hangings alone are concerned its whole function is to set off and emphasize by contrast the peculiar quality of the plain gold.

In the design of rugs and furniture, as in the composition of the room as a whole, straight and curved lines are similarly combined in regular or rhythmic relationships, so that while the alternation of these lines is esthetically pleasing and stimulating, the total effect is nevertheless restful because unifying. But when these combinations of unlike outlines are not repeated or echoed—as when a round or elliptical mirror is placed between the straight supports of a straight-lined dresser or hung above a rectangular wall table or cabinet, or when a circular pillow is used on a big straight-lined davenport—no element of likeness is present and the contrast stands out in sharp relief.

While it is clearly impossible to formulate rules for the employment of contrast in decorative practice, because its use, like everything else in the art, must be governed by the requirements of fitness and by the dictates of individual feeling, a few considerations ought always to be borne in mind by the decorator. In general it must be remembered that contrast, whether

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of color, form or texture, is esthetically pleasing simply because it relieves the mind from the sense of too

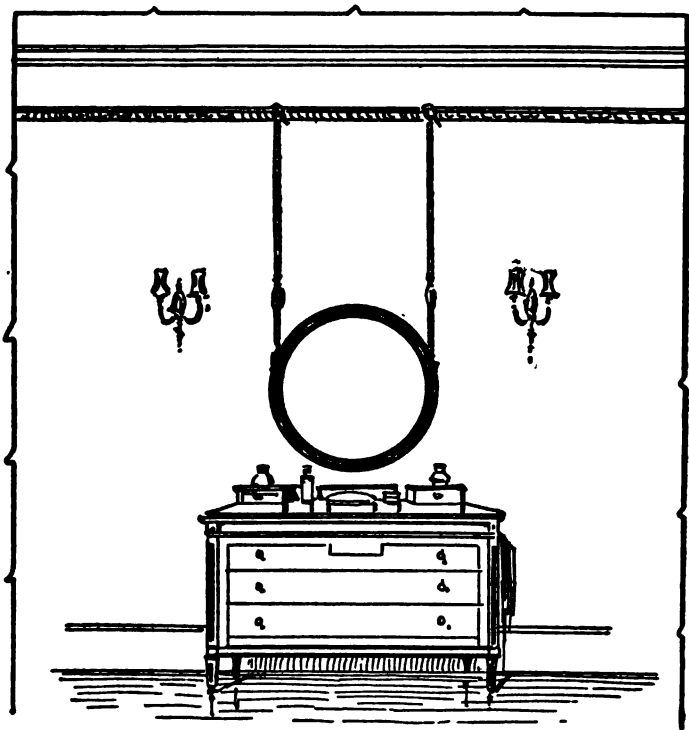


FIGURE 22.—Dresser and mirror in sharp contrast. Note that a circular mirror is unpleasant when hung with two vertical cords. See Figure 40.

much likeness, or harmony, just as occasional changes in tempo, rhythm or force in music relieve the mind and

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add interest and charm. But in decoration, as in music, whenever the number of elements introduced for contrast becomes so great, or their opposition so sharp, that the mind fails to perceive without effort the predominant likenesses or unity of the composition its beauty is impaired or destroyed. Hence the number of such contrasts must in any case be limited. Moreover, contrast means a sense of activity; and while there must be some activity everywhere except in death, the amount of it desirable in a room to be occupied day in and day out is less than might be supposed. It will vary, of course, with the purpose of the room and the tastes, pursuits and health of the people who use the room, and with the size of the room itself. Activity always requires a clear space. Hence a degree and intensity of contrast agreeable in a large room would be intolerable in a small one.

However, the primary consideration must always be the motive or emotional significance of the decorative scheme. We have seen that the repose and tranquillity of a room vary directly with the emphasis placed upon the unity in its treatment, while its effect of cheerfulness and animation varies directly with the emphasis placed upon diversity. Thus relative uniformity, either in color or in outline, tends to emphasize the tranquillity, seriousness and dignity of a room, and this effect is enhanced by convergence of both color and outline; while relative absence of uniformity, as it results from the free employment of contrast, tends to emphasize the effect of gayety and animation. Few contrasts, and those of mini-



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mum intensity, give to a decorative treatment an effect of quiet and softness; while sharp contrasts tend to produce a powerful effect, in direct proportion to the size of the contrasting masses and the degree of their unlikeness. Sir Joshua Reynolds pointed out that the style of painting in which strong colors are opposed to one another in large masses is grander and more striking than one in which the colors are used in more nearly uniform intensity, or smaller areas, and tenderly blended; and the same differences obviously result from varying degrees of emphasis in contrasts of shapes and sizes.

In practice the mere fact of contrast is very much less important than the intensity of the contrast, and this is particularly true of color. Red and green of one-fourth intensity or less form a contrast agreeable in large areas; red and green of spectral purity would be intolerable in any except minute quantities. Colors may be contrasted in hue, purity, or tone, or in any two or all three of these constants simultaneously. One of these elements is sufficient for many contrasts, and for practical purposes two constitute the limit. Thus a blue and gold damask offers a contrast in both hue and tone. To make a difference in the purity of the hues would be altogether too much.

When contrast is employed purely for accent, or to give snap to the room, the decorator must be governed by the fact that every sharp contrast is in effect a royal invitation to the eye, which is bound by its nature to attend to a powerful stimulus. Accordingly he must first of all see to it that the element

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thrown into prominence by the contrast is in itself beautiful, or at least interesting, since to force into an unnecessary prominence an object or material intrinsically ugly or commonplace would be worse than folly. An ill-designed embroidered sofa cushion, for example, will remain fairly inoffensive if it is in the same color or tone as the sofa covering; but when an ugly light cushion is placed against a dark background, or when an ugly cushion of any tone is placed against its complementary hue, all its ugliness is brought out for all the world to see. Similarly a bad picture or an ill-looking carved chair will be more noticeable against a plain wall than against one covered with an inconspicuous all-over design, and its visible ugliness will increase directly with the degree of contrast, in hue, tone and texture, between the object and its background.

Moreover, the decorator must see to it that the point of sharpest contrast coincides with the point of greatest decorative interest. A spirited picture, for example, will have its decorative importance enhanced by contrast with the wall. But if the picture be mounted on a very light mat and hung against a relatively dark wall the point of sharpest contrast will lie at the juncture of the wall and mat surfaces, and the decorative value of the picture will be diminished if not entirely lost. Finally, the contrasting element must be so placed as to satisfy the sense of balance. This matter is comparatively unimportant when the contrasting element is itself small and unimportant—as, for example, when a little purple vase is placed on a

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small satinwood table; but in the degree that the element is large or decoratively important it must be placed in a carefully balanced relation to the background. Her Grace may wear a *mouche* anywhere from her eye to her chin, but her coronet must go on straight.

In conclusion we may note that here as everywhere in decoration wisdom lies in moderation. Contrast loses all its pleasantness and stimulating quality when used too freely. Too many elements introduced for contrast, and too sharp differences among them, will destroy the repose and mar the beauty of any room. And while the amount and the intensity of contrast is properly very largely a matter of individual feeling, it is certainly true of the individual, as of the race and the epoch, that the more highly one's taste is cultivated the less one welcomes strong contrasts.

## CHAPTER IX

### PROPORTION

**A** FURNISHED room does not grow as do the lilies of the field. It must be fashioned by studied creative processes. Yet it is the distinguishing characteristic and highest excellence of a perfectly furnished room that it appears to be not a creation but a growth. In every such room each part is so subtly related to all the other parts and to the whole that the relationship appears to be organic. As a result of faultless calculation there is no evidence of calculation. The completed room seems to have grown spontaneously to a perfection to which nothing could be added and from which nothing could be taken away.

This organic harmony is dependent first of all upon proportion. Indeed proportion, or the relation or adaptation of one portion to another, or to the whole, as respects magnitude, quality or degree, is the dominant element in interior decoration, as it is in all the arts of design. Not only the beauty of every form in nature and in art, but its essential character and significance as well, is conditioned by the relationships borne by each of its parts to all the other parts and to the whole. The oak tree is beautiful, and so is the

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birch, and each has a fiber that is hard and enduring; yet we think always of the oak as sturdy, vigorous and indomitable, and of the birch as graceful, delicate and yielding. Similarly, the body of a perfectly developed athlete is always beautiful; yet no one expects the proportions of the wrestler or the weight-thrower to be the same as those of the runner or the vaulter. Each is beautiful in his own way, because the parts of his body are adapted not only to his stature, but also to the requirements of the game in which he is trained to compete. We can admire both; but we could by no possibility admire a form in which the great shoulders and torso of the one were joined to the slender hips and legs of the other. Inevitably such a form would appear grotesquely ugly in appearance and monstrous in significance.

The sense of proportion derived subconsciously from long familiarity with growing things, and particularly with the human body, conditions our artistic judgments. We expect to find things together which seem capable of having grown together; that is, things characterized by relationships analogous to the relationships existing among growing things. Thus we are best satisfied when the column or pilaster has both a capital, or head, and a plinth or foot; or when the ratio of valance to side hangings is the same as the ratio of head to body. And because the tree, fixed and immovable, has a trunk that tapers from bottom to top, while the animals, moving at will from place to place, have legs that taper from top to bottom, it happens that in the design of furniture the billiard table, which

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is fixed and immovable, may have legs that taper from bottom to top; that heavy sofas, chairs and tables which though not fixed are not easily movable, may have legs that do not taper either way; but that light and easily movable pieces, to satisfy the subcon-

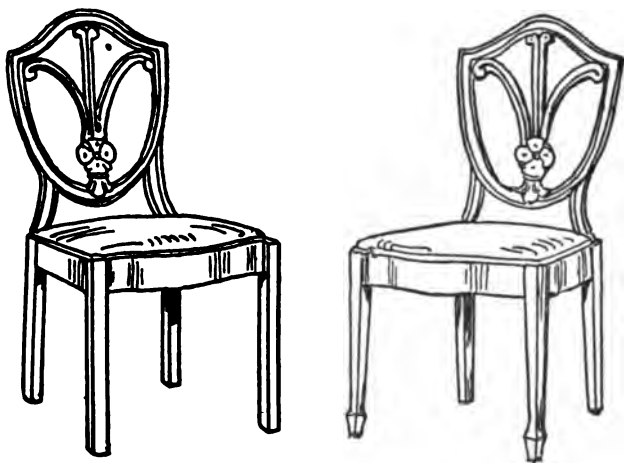


FIGURE 23.—These small light chairs are identical except for the legs. Note that the example with tapering legs is far more satisfying than the one with legs which do not taper.

scious judgments of the mind, must have legs that taper from top to bottom.

The attempt to formulate laws of proportion was first made by the Greeks, through whose unique genius the whole realm of human thought and emotion found expression. Observing that the human body—to them the most admirable and beautiful object in the world—is characterized by fairly definite proportions, or

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relationships among its parts, they set about it to reduce the design of buildings to a similar basis. Taking the size of a single architectural member—usually the semi-diameter of a column at its base—as a module or unit of proportion, they established ideal ratios between this module and every other part of the building. Having decided, in the case of a particular building, upon a linear value for his module, the Greek architect could construct his whole building, whatever its size, according to the laws of proportion, as the anatomist can reconstruct an entire body from a single bone.

The progressive development of Greek architecture, typified most clearly in the three orders, offers an admirable field for the study of proportion as it conditions both the creation of beautiful forms and the expression of emotional ideas. Thus the Doric column—to speak, most incompletely, of the column only and not of its entablature—reveals the characteristics of the race that created it, a race vigorous, proud-spirited and grave, of rigid morals, an austere and solemn religion, a passionate love of warfare and of the mimic combats of the gymnasium. The Doric column seems to spring directly and powerfully from the rock of its foundation. Its height is less than six diameters. It tapers strikingly from base to top, has but slight entasis, and is channeled with flutings deeply cut and acute. Thus the order is characterized, particularly in its earlier monuments, by a massive solidity, a virile emphasis upon constructional forms, and a rude and solemn majesty. It was refined

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and softened as it developed, but it never lost its essential character, which is inherent in its proportions. X In the Parthenon, at once the most perfect example of the style and the most beautiful building of the ancient world, there is little of softness or of elegance; but throughout and above all there is a sense of immense strength, of immemorial repose, and of calm and noble majesty.

The Ionic order, born of another racial stock and a later age and employed in the design of temples consecrated to divinities less austere and virile and more gracious, yielding and lovely, reveals the change toward these qualities chiefly through changes in proportion. The Ionic column has a height of from eight to nine diameters. It is slender, graceful, springs from a base composed of subtle curves, is channeled with flutings more slightly marked and separated, and completed by a volute capital which combines superlative grace and beauty of curved line with chaste and delicate ornament.

The Corinthian column is still more slender in proportion, having a height of ten diameters or more. Its flutings are separated by fillets terminating in curved forms, its capitals richly embellished with rows of carved leaves and elaborately constructed ornament. Thus for the severity of the Doric and the svelte delicacy of the Ionic the Corinthian order substitutes a quality of richness and magnificence.

The changes exemplified by the Greek orders are characteristic of the development of all the arts. Always they emerge vigorous, forceful and austere; al-



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ways they become more delicate, more elegant, more graceful; always in the end they achieve a style rich, pretentious and florid. The arts change with changes

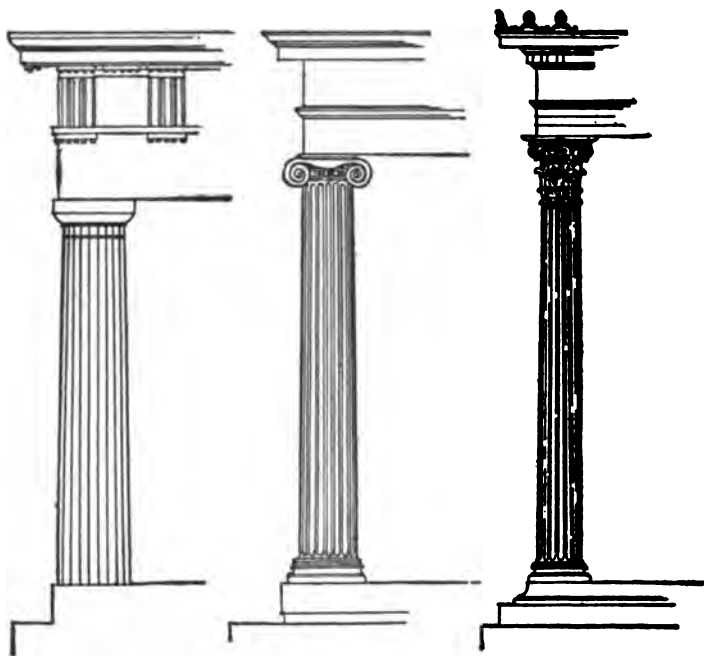


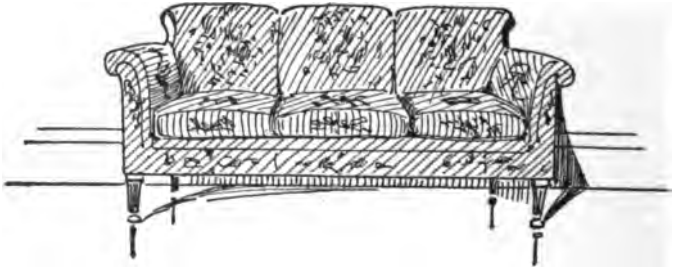
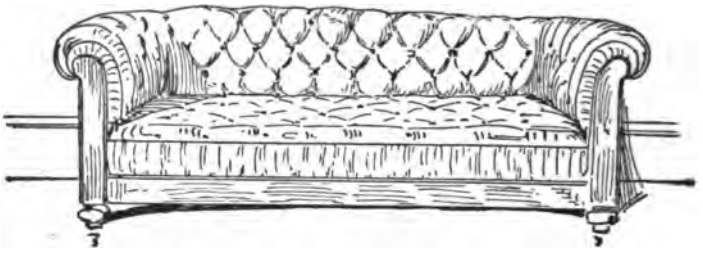
FIGURE 24.—The Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian columns.

in society, and in the degree that they are real arts—that is, real expression, rather than a foolish striving to put new wine into old bottles—their works are adapted in proportion as in everything else to the needs and aspirations of the people who create them.

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It is manifest, therefore, that excellence in proportion, like excellence everywhere else in interior decoration, is first of all a matter of fitness. We cannot use a Doric column in the architecture of a Louis XVI salon, nor can we use an over-stuffed sofa or a Renaissance table in its decoration. That is, we cannot use massive furniture, or large, heavy and strikingly ornamented accessories in a small room, or in any room which is designed to be dainty, gay or elegant. For just as the draft horse, beautiful as he strains at his load, would be absurd and ridiculous on the race course; and as the powerful shoulders and barrel-like chest of the wrestler would be unfitting and hence unbeautiful in the hurdler, so the proportions of a living room—using the term as defined to mean the adaptation of one part to the others and to the whole as respects magnitude, quality and quantity—could never be precisely the same as those of a drawing room, because these rooms do not have the same purpose or meet the same needs, and hence cannot have the same significance or express the same idea.

We have seen that the fundamental principle of decorative composition is to put together things which, either in appearance or in significance, are more or less alike. This principle conditions the choice not only of lines, colors, patterns and symbols, but also of shapes and sizes. All the parts of a furnished room must be congruous. That is, they must appear to the mind to have grown together in the process of expressing a common idea. Thus the idea of repose, for example, is as we have seen inevitably associated



**FIGURE 25.**—Note the change toward effects of lightness, delicacy, elegance, animation and gaiety with smaller size and more slender structural parts.

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with horizontal as opposed to vertical extension. Accordingly the proportions of the room to be furnished, as well as of its principal decorative units, must reveal a marked emphasis upon length as opposed to height in the degree that an effect of repose is aimed at. Similarly, because the ideas of strength, heaviness, immobility, importance, permanence and dignity are inevitably associated with large size, the room itself and the important decorative elements used in it must be more or less large in the degree that these ideas are to be expressed, and more or less small in the degree that the ideas of delicacy, lightness, mobility, triviality, transience or grace are to be expressed.

It is obvious that in setting about the creation of a room which shall adequately express a given emotional idea we must begin with the proportions of the room itself, since to select and arrange furniture characterized by horizontality in a room which was itself characterized by verticality could make only for confusion and ugliness. But while the decorator can determine the size and proportions of the units that he places in a given room, it usually happens in practice that he has nothing to do with the proportions of the room itself, but must take them as he finds them. When, as frequently happens, they do not accord with the motive of his projected treatment, he must either change his motive to fit the actual proportions of the room, or else he must change the apparent proportions of the room to fit his motive. That is, he must, through the employment of a variety of decorative artifices, increase or reduce the apparent height of

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the ceiling, make the room seem longer or shorter, wider or narrower, larger or smaller.

Let us take as an example the case of a living room which it is proposed to characterize by a marked effect of tranquillity and repose. Here, as always, the decorator will seek to achieve his purpose through a convergence of artistic effects. He will accordingly, other factors permitting, place a marked emphasis throughout (a) upon the unity as opposed to the diversity of the treatment; (b) upon low tones of color as opposed to high values; and (c) upon horizontal extension as opposed to vertical extension. ✕A long low room, with broad windows and a wide fireplace, will of course present no difficulties. Where the ceiling is high, however, and the openings narrow, the room must be treated skillfully if the motive of repose is to be convincingly expressed. In such a room the ceiling must be brought down in appearance by the use of a color as dark as the lighting of the room will permit—preferably only a few tones lighter than the wall. A rough surface, like coarse canvas or sand-finished plaster, will help to bring down the ceiling, as will plaster relief or beaming. Reducing the amount of light thrown upon the ceiling through the use of direct light fixtures and of lamps properly shaded will have the same effect. Where there is no cornice the ceiling color may be carried down on the side walls to the height of the windows, or to a distance equal approximately to one-eighth of the total wall height, and its juncture with the wall color covered by a narrow molding. Horizontal divisions of the wall by a

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dado or frieze, or both, tend to reduce the apparent height of the ceiling, provided, of course, that the dominant lines of the frieze are horizontal or diagonal and not vertical. The walls can also be made to seem lower through the use of a paper or other wall fabric designed upon the circle or hexagon as a basis. The horizontal lines of the windows must be emphasized, usually by means of valances or lambrequins, and it will frequently be found desirable to extend the hangings a few inches beyond the casing on each side in order to increase the apparent width of the opening and thus to emphasize the horizontality of the treatment. The hangings should be caught back in order to break their straight vertical lines, which would tend to increase the apparent height of the room. Couches, tables, bookcases and other important objects will of course be relatively long and low, and vases, lamp-bowls and shades relatively wide and squat; while the rug, which to be most effective in a room of this sort ought to be relatively large and to approximate rather closely the proportions of the room, will be low in tone and either broken in hue or of thick pile or coarse texture in order to strengthen the base of the decorative treatment, and to emphasize the floor as opposed to the walls. In order to make the large pieces of furniture which are placed against the walls appear sufficiently high to harmonize with the proportions of the wall spaces and at the same time to preserve and emphasize their horizontality, it will be necessary to select pieces which are actually long as compared with their height, and then to place above them

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wide low pictures, mirrors, plastic friezes, or other similarly shaped elements. The mind, regarding each group of this sort as a unit, will be satisfied with the total height of the group as related to the wall height, while at the same time it will be strongly conscious of the dominant horizontal lines of the individual pieces. In this connection it is to be noted that because the eye moves more easily and quickly from side to side than up and down there is a constant tendency to overestimate the length of vertical as opposed to horizontal lines—a fact that the decorator must take into account in planning any treatment in which horizontals are to be emphasized.

When on the other hand the ceiling is too low to accord well with the other dimensions of the room, or when the ceiling of a room of normal proportions is to be raised in appearance in order to decrease the tranquillity and increase the animation, buoyancy and gayety of the room, nearly all of these processes must be reversed. Here the ceiling will normally be made very light in tone, relatively smooth in texture, and well illuminated both by day and by night. No heavy cornice can be used, and the ceiling must be kept free from cross-beams and even from ornamental plaster in deep relief. Horizontal divisions of the wall spaces will as far as possible be eliminated, while verticals will be emphasized in the background surfaces as far as practicable, providing always that they stop short of the point where stiffness begins. In practice this means that while vertical paneling or fairly pronounced stripes, which tend to push up the ceiling and pull

## *Proportion*

in the walls, can be used happily in large rooms, the treatment of small rooms must be limited to relatively narrow and indistinct stripes. As far as is consistent with their proper function, the principal pieces of furniture will be relatively tall and narrow, and these proportions should be repeated and accented in the selection of pictures, vases, lamps and other accessories. The hangings will normally be made to increase the apparent height of the room by falling straight or almost straight. Where their texture is not too light or the distance from floor to sill too great they should be run to the floor, except in the case of markedly informal rooms, and it is very often desirable still further to emphasize the verticality of the hangings by the use of a valance, cut or pleated so that its bottom line describes a concave curve, and hung above the casing at a point just high enough to cover with its lower edge the top of the glass.

When the length of a room is too great to accord well with its width, means must be adopted which tend to restore the apparent proportions to what the mind regards as normal and therefore as pleasing. The first step is to arrange the long axes of the rugs and the large pieces of furniture, as far as possible, to run in the short axis of the room, since it is a principle of design that straight lines enclosed within a space increase the apparent dimension of the space in the direction of the lines. Two rugs of the same size and shape may be used, or three rugs, one approximately square in the center and one relatively long and narrow at either end. Orientals, or patterned rugs with many



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border lines, are better than plain rugs for this purpose. Choice between the use of two or three rugs will of course depend largely upon whether the furniture is to be arranged in two principal groups or kept more closely together in one. It often happens that a long and narrow room has a fireplace at one side, with the hearth projecting two or three feet or even farther into the room. To use a single long and narrow rug in such a situation would not only require a rug of unpleasing shape, unsymmetrically placed, and so different in proportions from the floor as to arouse a disagreeable consciousness of lack of harmony; but it would also further accentuate the length of the room as opposed to its width. Where for any reason the use of two or three rugs in such a situation is not considered desirable it is in general best to have a large plain or self-toned rug specially made to lie within fifteen or twenty inches of the walls, and either woven or cut to fit snugly around the hearth. A single big rug will give repose and balance to the room, and if large enough it will not affect the apparent proportions adversely, though it will of course do nothing to correct them. When this treatment is adopted for the floor it will therefore be even more necessary to emphasize the lines running across the room by proper choice and arrangement of the furniture.

The proportions of a long and narrow room can sometimes be helped by the use of large architectural mirrors, which when placed on the side walls appear to double the apparent width of the room; and also by placing the larger pieces of furniture farthest from

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the principal entrance—a method which, through the effect of linear perspective and the inveterate disposition of the mind to regard large things as near and small things as remote, causes the room as seen from the principal entrance to seem shorter. Finally, the walls may be covered with a paper in a light, neutral, and if possible a cool color and a shadowy or indis-

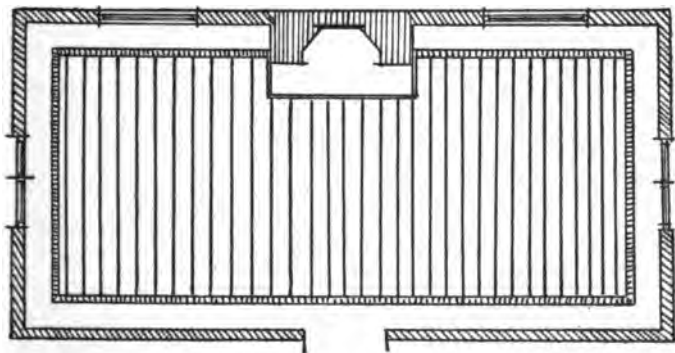


FIGURE 26.—The most satisfactory method of treating with a single large rug a long and narrow room having a deeply projecting hearth on one side.

tinct design, while a picture, cabinet or chair having a sharply defined outline and fairly bright coloring is placed in a conspicuous position at the remote end of the room, since the mind, through processes of association, always conceives of things with sharp outlines and bright coloring as being near at hand, and those with indistinct outline and neutral coloring as being far away.

In order to increase the apparent size of a room

## *The Principles of Interior Decoration*

which seems to be unpleasantly small the decorator can increase the amount and intensity of the illumination; use on the walls and ceiling light grayish tints, and especially tints of the cool colors; keep the walls plain or cover them with an indistinct and relatively small pattern; use furniture relatively small, of light and slender structural parts, and so graceful in outline as not to appear bulky, whatever its actual size; reduce the diversity of the whole decorative treatment by limiting the colors to tones of but two or three hues; keep the furniture in the same or closely related styles; and eliminate all superfluous detail and all sharp contrast of hue and tone.

To diminish the apparent size of a room which seems too large these processes will be reversed. Darker and less neutral tones of the warm colors can be used on the floors and walls; larger and more pronounced pattern on the background surfaces; larger and more bulky furniture and accessories; and, provided always that its essential unity be not imperiled, the variety of the treatment can be increased in hue, tone, line and form.

The important decorative elements of the room must be chosen to accord with the proportions of the room. That is, they must seem to the mind to be like the room, either in physical appearance or in emotional significance. For this reason as a general rule of practice the scale of all forms—rugs, furniture, pictures, lamps, vases, textile patterns, and so forth—will be increased directly with the size of the room. Thus a large room will normally look better with a

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large rug than with several small rugs because of like significance, since the large room necessarily affects the mind with a sense of heaviness, immobility and permanence, while small rugs necessarily affect it with a sense of lightness, mobility and transience. Moreover, the mind is better pleased with the large rug because of its easily perceptible physical resemblance to the floor; and this sense of pleasure increases, as in the light of our fundamental principle of putting like with like we would expect, directly with the degree of likeness in size and in shape, up to the point where these likenesses are easily but not too easily recognizable. For example, in a room fifteen by twenty feet, whose width is to its length as three is to four, the mind would demand an oblong rug, and its pleasure in such a rug, other things being equal, would increase as the proportions of the rug approached the ratio of three to four. It would not, however, accept a small rug of these proportions, as 6' x 8', 7'6" x 10', or even 9' x 12', because the edges of such a rug would lie so far from the edges of the room that the likeness in proportion could be perceived only as the result of mental effort, which is always inimical to esthetic pleasure. On the other hand, a rug 14'3" x 19' would be too nearly identical with the floor to interest the mind, which would prefer a resemblance easily recognizable but of some subtlety, such as would be afforded, let us say, by a rug 11'3" x 15'.

It is most important to note that where small rugs are used, the floor itself, and not the rugs, serves as the base of the decorative treatment, and the small rugs

## *The Principles of Interior Decoration*

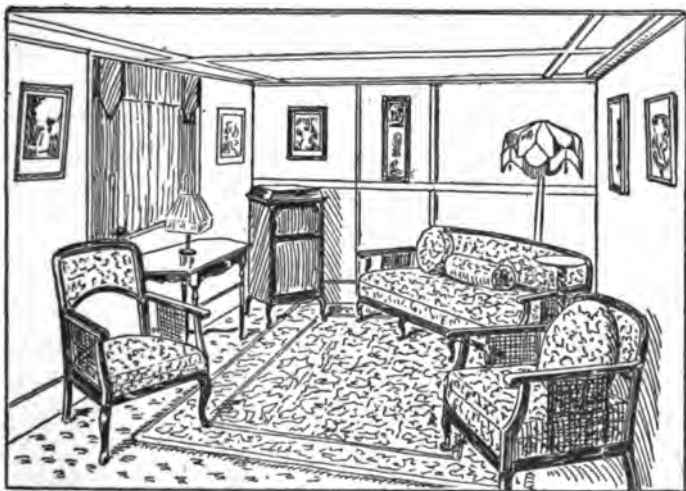
serve merely as ornament on that base. In this situation the floor must be toned to a depth which seems to the mind heavy enough to support the room, while the small rugs must, like all good ornament, be related to the structure by definite and easily perceptible relationships. Not only must their coloring and design harmonize with the other things in the room; their structural lines must conform to the structural lines of the room itself. That is, they must be so placed that their primary axis parallels either the primary or secondary axis of the room. To place a rug obliquely on a floor is in effect the same thing as to hang a picture or to carve the ornament of a chair back obliquely.

The same thing is true of the arrangement of furniture, in direct proportion to the size, bulk and structural emphasis of the individual pieces. While the subject will be discussed in the chapter on balance, it may be noted here that almost invariably the important units in a room—piano, reading table, davenport, bed, dresser, and so forth—must be made to parallel one or the other of the walls, no matter how far away from that wall they may actually stand. The idea that a room can be freed from an effect of stiffness or over-formality and invested with a quality of lightness and personal charm by placing heavy pieces of furniture askew in it is as erroneous as it is widespread.

♪ In the choice of furniture, lamps and pictures the decorator will be guided by the general requirement for congruity in scale. Of course this is not to be interpreted as meaning that every piece of furniture

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and every textile pattern must be big in a big room, or small in a small room; it means simply that the principal pieces, the really significant objects that together constitute its organic structure, must be of a shape and bulk that is consonant with the shape and size as



**FIGURE 27.**—This cut is redrawn from a so-called model living room for a flat. Four among the five pieces of furniture are placed obliquely. Note also the stiffness and total lack of interest due to the use of three large matched pieces in a small room.

well as with the purpose of the room, as the thigh or torso of the athlete must be proportioned not only to his height, but also to the requirements of the game in which he is trained to compete. This analogy makes it easy to understand that even in the case of two rooms of the same floor plan a difference in the character of

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the rooms will necessitate differences in the proportions of many of the decorative units and in their relation to the whole, since it is only through the proportions of its parts that the true character of any whole can be constituted and revealed. Thus in the degree that a drawing room is to express the ideas of animation and gayety, as opposed to those of tranquillity and sobriety, it must be filled with relatively small and light pieces of furniture and decorative objects, even when the room itself is large. In this situation the decorator must depend for the effect of size and bulk necessary to accord harmoniously with the size of the room upon careful grouping. Two light chairs and a small table, for example, grouped for conversation or tea, affect the mind as one rather than as three units, and therefore satisfy the esthetic requirements of consonance, while the small size of the individual pieces accords with the function and decorative motive of the room. The mere fact of grouping will satisfy the esthetic requirements; the constitution, placement and arrangement of the various groups must of course be determined in practice by such considerations of suitability as the purpose of the room, the location of fireplace, windows, doors and lighting outlets, and the tastes of the people who use the room.

It is to be remembered also that actual size and apparent bulkiness are by no means the same thing. Slender structural parts and graceful lines reduce astonishingly the apparent size of a piece of furniture. A finely designed sofa in one of the eighteenth century

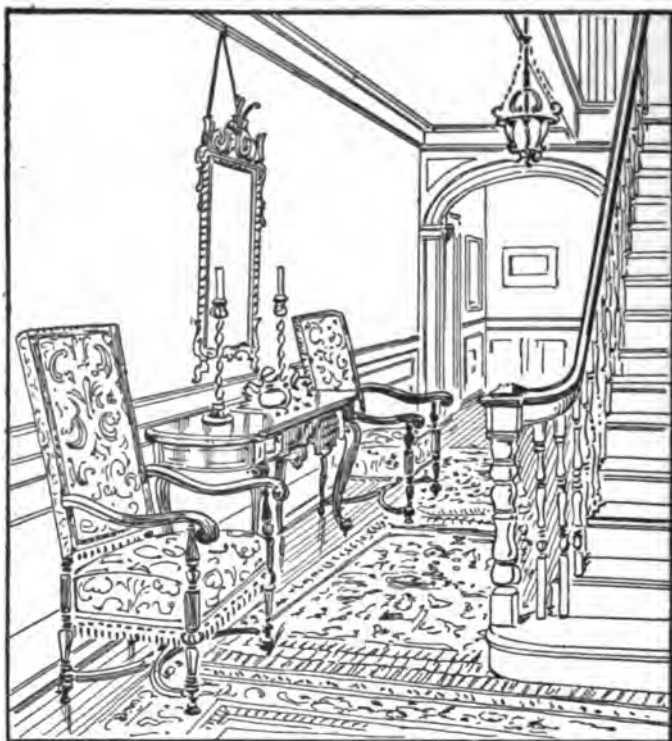
## *Proportion*

English or French styles appears to be a third smaller than a present-day over-stuffed sofa of the same actual dimensions; and the same differences in mere bulkiness and in apparent as distinguished from actual dimensions mark the French *fauteuil* and the American tub chair, Hepplewhite and Craftsman tables, Pompeiian and Renaissance floor lamps, and so on throughout the whole range of furniture. Thus the decorator may choose furniture consonant not only with the size but also with the character of any room, making the pieces increasingly less bulky and more light and graceful as the motive of the room becomes increasingly more animated and gay, and emphasizing the effect thus produced by the use of textures of closer weave, greater power of reflecting light and lighter and more delicate coloring.

This point is worthy of further emphasis. For reasons which it would be tedious to attempt to analyze here there is a very widespread idea that mere bulk is in some way essential to comfort in furniture. Thus many women feel that a living room, to be comfortably furnished, must, regardless of its size, have a big davenport and two or more big chairs. When these pieces, together, usually, with a reading table and a piano, have been installed in a small room there is very little space for anything else, and to the mind there seems to be none at all. Living in such a room is like living in a crowd. The room is hopelessly out of scale, and its bad proportions are aggravated by the physical necessity of keeping such other pieces as are



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**FIGURE 28.**—This group is well constituted, but the individual units are so large as to give to the narrow hall an unpleasant effect of over-crowding—an effect intensified by the use of small, light rugs.

essential to the uses of the room as much smaller than they ought to be as the big pieces are larger than they ought to be.

The same effect of incongruous proportion is often

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seen in the bedroom, where for the sake of more drawer space or larger mirrors, or by reason of a singularly inept preference for mere mass, furniture is chosen of a size that dwarfs the room; in the dining room, where a table so large as to destroy the organic harmony of the treatment is chosen because the doily service will look well when there are eight for luncheon; and especially in the den. We have all seen this tiny den, so popular a few years ago, with its one big Turkish chair and its big reading table, around which one must thread his way gingerly in order to avoid knocking over the smoking table, the magazine rack, and the one small remaining chair. Of course no one with the slightest feeling for form or fitness could be comfortable in such a room. As a matter of fact no one ever tried to be; for such rooms were no sooner furnished than they were deserted, to remain of no more value in the economy of the household than an unused closet.

While we are here concerned with the individual decorative units only as they help to form an organic whole, it must be noted that the same general principles of proportion apply to their design. The legs of a table, for example, or of a chair or sofa, must be of a size that seems to the mind such as would naturally have grown on a piece of its dimensions and weight. Undoubtedly short straight legs two inches in diameter would be sufficient to support the largest davenport; yet such legs would appear grotesquely inadequate and ugly. When we see such a piece supported by bun legs four or five inches in diameter, however, we

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are satisfied. A small light-toned picture in a very heavy frame is as unsatisfactory as a large dark-toned picture in a very light frame. A nine by twelve rug with a border twenty-seven inches wide lacks beauty of proportion, as does a rug of the same size with a nine-inch border.

Figure 30, taken, with its accompanying comment, from Mayeux's "*La composition décorative*," page 153, perfectly illustrates the principle involved. The panel

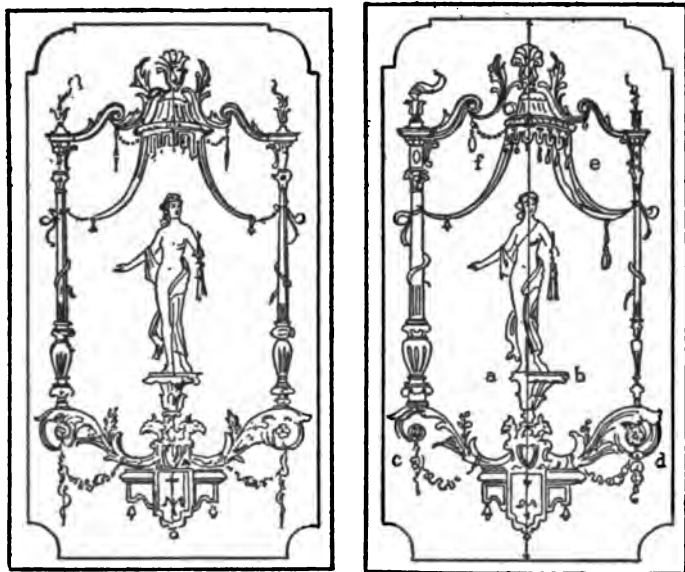


FIGURE 29.—The legs of this sofa are in fact quite strong enough to support its weight; yet they appear to the mind to be inadequate and even grotesque.

A, one of the fanciful decorative subjects much employed during the Renaissance and later, shows a figure resting upon a bracket supported by two foliated consoles. These consoles also support two little columns which serve to hold up the canopy. Although the design is a work of pure fancy, and the actual strength of the scaffolding is of no importance, nevertheless the mind is perturbed and dissatisfied if any element of the composition appears to be too light or too heavy, too narrow or too wide, for the whole, as in B.

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Thus if the bracket is too narrow (a) the figure appears uncomfortable and constrained in its attitude; while if it is too wide the figure appears (b) to have too much room and thus to lose its fixed place in the



A

FIGURE 30.

B

composition. The consoles, designed too thin (c) in connection with columns too thick, seem to bend under the burden they bear; inversely, at (d) they appear clumsy and of an exaggerated weight and strength in connection with the load they bear. Similarly, the relationships between the columns and the

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canopy must be congruous; so that the latter will be neither too heavy (e) nor too light and narrow (f).

Not only the size but also the structural emphasis of all important forms is in general increased directly with the scale of the room. The contrast in tone between trim and the wall is slightly intensified; textile patterns are made slightly bolder; moldings, picture frames and table tops are given more projection; and the weight-bearing and strength-revealing lines of the furniture are accentuated. Moreover, since the mind associates dark colors with the ideas of bulk, heaviness and strength, the tonality of the room is progressively lowered.

It is manifest that no formulas can be deduced sufficiently specific to be of value in this matter; nor are any necessary. Careful and continued observation and analysis of good and bad examples of furniture, rugs, picture frames, lamps and other objects, and of their employment in particular rooms, together with the study of buildings and of architectural drawings and photographs and of the human body in painting and sculpture, will be enough to train the eye to perceive niceties of proportion. For the decorator there is no escape from these slow processes of growth. Here, as elsewhere in the art, there is no substitute for a sure taste.

Up to this point we have been concerned with proportion as expressive of significance and functional fitness, and with the adaptation of the various members of a decorative treatment to each other and to the whole. But the question very naturally suggests

## *Proportion*

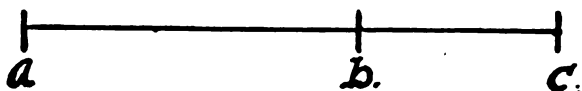
itself as to whether there may not be such a thing as intrinsically pleasing proportions, apart from any considerations of fitness or significance. May there not be some ideal ratio which we can accept as a norm by which to judge excellence or the lack of it in decorative composition?

This question was answered affirmatively by the artists of the Renaissance as the result of their study of proportion in classic art, and their conclusions were elaborated and set forth in the early part of the last century by Xeising in a treatise in which he urged as the ideal proportion what he called the Golden Section, or a division of any whole into two parts in such a way that the whole is to the larger part as the larger is to the smaller. Thus in the line  $ac$ , in Figure 31,  $ac : ab :: ab : bc$ , while in the rectangle the sum of the two diameters is to the longer diameter as the longer is to the shorter. Worked out arithmetically, this ratio is about that of five to three.

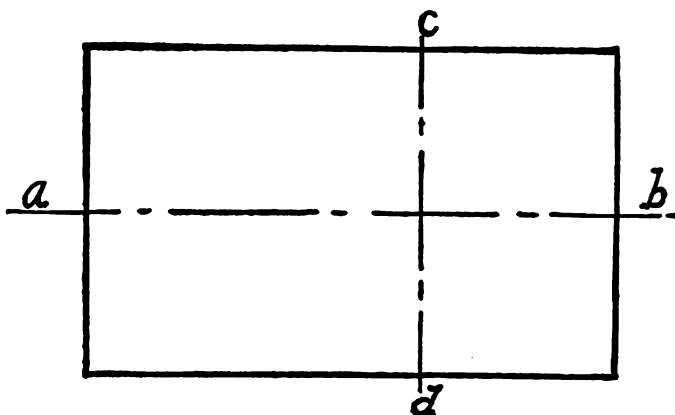
The golden section satisfies the requirements of the mind, and may be accepted as an approximate ideal. The basic fact with reference to excellence in proportion is that it is based upon the laws of repetition and principality. For example, the length and breadth of a rectangle, in order to satisfy the esthetic requirements of the mind, must be nearly enough alike so that their likeness is easily apparent; yet one dimension must be enough greater than the other to satisfy the need for a dominant element. Of the three rectangles shown in Figure 32, A, being square, satisfies the demand for likeness but not for principality; while

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B satisfies the demand for principality but not that for repetition. C alone satisfies both demands, and therefore it is alone accepted by the mind as of pleas-



$$ac : ab :: ab : bc$$



$$ab + cd : ab :: ab : cd$$

FIGURE 31.—The proportions of the Golden Section.

ing proportions. The ratio thus applied to the division of lines and the dimensions of rectangles was held by Xeising to be applicable to the dimensions of ellipses, rhombs and other geometrical forms, and in the arts of design to the proportions of floor and wall

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spaces, windows, doors, tables, rugs, books, vases, frames, chairs and chairbacks, and so on.

This ratio is pleasing because, as Raymond has pointed out, the mind judges of proportion by unconscious comparison of like spatial units, as it judges of

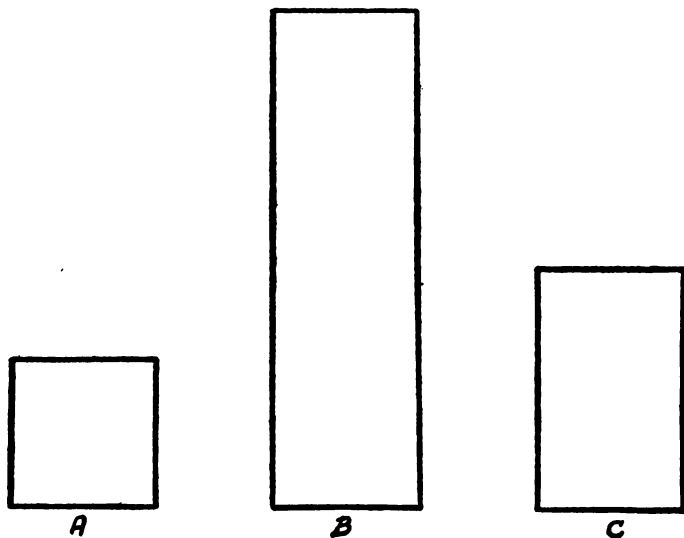


FIGURE 32.

rhythm in music and poetry by comparison of like accents. As long as these units are expressible in small ratios, like 1:1 or 1:2, they are easily perceptible. As the number of units is increased the ratio becomes more difficult to perceive and the proportion more subtle, up to the point where the mind is unable to judge the ratio. Thus the ratio 2:3 is more subtle and more interesting than the ratio 1:1, yet it is easily



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sensed by the mind. On the other hand, ratios like 4:7, 7:12, or 9:14 involve a number of divisions beyond the power of the mind to grasp. Primitive art is very simple and involves endless repetition of the ratio 1:1, but as man's intelligence increases and his esthetic perceptions are developed his taste demands more subtle relationships. The proportion of 3:5 satisfies the most highly trained eye and mind, as it satisfied the Greeks, because it is the most subtle that the mind can grasp with the ease necessary to esthetic enjoyment.

Long before the time of Xeising Vitruvius stated that the length of a room should be to its breadth as 5:3, or as 3:2; or, in the case of very large apartments, as 2:1. The decorator will find in practice that when a room varies widely from this ideal its apparent proportions must be altered through some of the devices noted above before the room can be made to seem satisfactory to a critical taste; and that, within the limits necessarily imposed by their function and particular situation, the various forms and surfaces in his treatment will be found to be increasingly pleasing to the mind as they approach the proportions of the golden section.

Our instinctive insistence upon the presence of a dominant element in every composition conditions the proportions of all horizontal divisions of the wall spaces. When a wall is divided into two parts only, one part must be perceptibly wider than the other, and the more nearly these divisions approximate the ratio of five to three, other things being equal, the more

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pleasing they will be. Figure 33 shows a dining room wall in which this ratio appears in the proportions of the wall itself, in the division into paneling and frieze, and in the opening. This, of course, is not a law, but only a safe guide. In practice the horizontal division of a given wall space may vary widely from these proportions and still be entirely satisfactory, provided only that the mind is left in no doubt as to the presence

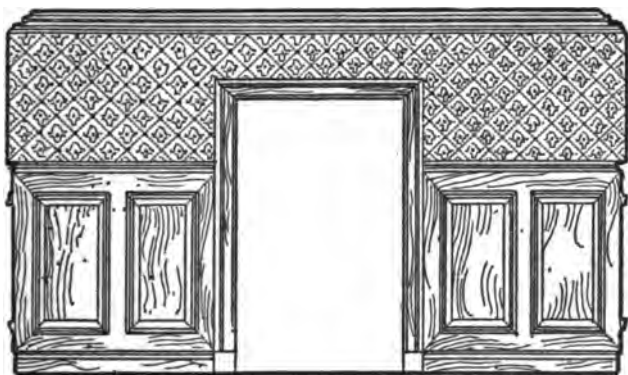


FIGURE 33.

of a dominant element. The ratio might also require to be modified to make allowance for the peculiar effect of the design of paneling or frieze. Thus vertical panels without any horizontal rails would increase the apparent height of the lower member, while a frieze designed upon marked horizontal lines or wide lateral curves would apparently diminish that of the upper member.

When, in the case of large and important rooms,

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there are three or more horizontal divisions, one must perceptibly exceed the total of all the others. The elevation shown in Figure 34, based upon the Tuscan order, has a height of 11'6", with a dado of 2'3", a sidewall of 7'2", a frieze of 1'6", and a 7" cornice.

In the decoration of a given room these proportions will naturally be so adjusted as best to accord with the motive of the room, the character and projection of its trim, and the design and coloring of the frieze; but as a rough rule of practice we may, taking one-nineteenth of the ceiling height as a module, give the dado a height of four mo-

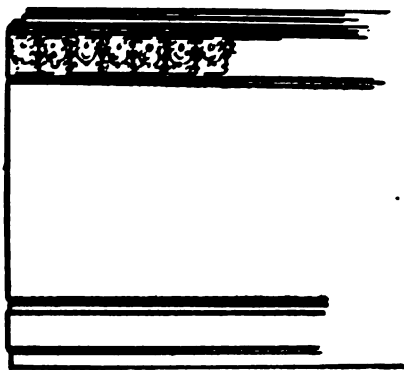


FIGURE 34.

dules, the sidewall twelve or slightly less, the frieze two or slightly more, and the cornice one or slightly less.

Where there are no horizontal divisions other than the regular low baseboard and a cornice or picture molding at the ceiling the difference between the sidewall and the other two members is so great that the mind makes no attempt to compare them, but instead compares the total height of the room with the windows, which thus become the element to be given primcipality, and which ought accordingly to be longer

## *Proportion*

than the total of the space above the windows plus the space below. Here the mind is in general best satisfied when the space below the window is about one-third of the height of the window itself, while the space above is about one-fourth of the length of the window. Thus a room with a ceiling nine feet and six inches high would look well with windows six feet long, having two feet from sill to floor, and one foot six inches from top of window to ceiling. It must, of course, be noted that these vague generalizations are not intended to apply to the design of great apartments, where the openings will start from the floor and be carried by means of over-door and over-window treatments to the cornice. They apply to rooms of ordinary size and proportions only, and then merely as suggestions which are reasonably sure to lead to satisfactory results. Nothing could be more false than the assumption that relations of proportion can be reduced to unalterable formulas.

The beauty of proportion which is the principal element of that organic harmony characteristic of a well-furnished room depends first of all upon a proper emphasis of structure. In the perfect room we are always conscious of being indoors, not out. At the back of the mind lies always the intimate sense of shelter, of protection, of freedom to live our lives unhindered by nature or by man. This implies a sense of strong walls, of adequate coverings for the openings, above all of a firm roof over our heads. No room can be a perfect room unless it makes us subtly aware of the presence of these primary requirements of shelter.

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The trim or woodwork of a room outlines its structure and helps to steady and support its decorative treatment. It is clear that the emphasis to be placed upon this structural outline will vary according to the character of the room and the way in which it is to be furnished, since anything large, heavy, elaborate or complex will require a stronger structural support than will anything small or light or simple. The effect of strength and importance of the woodwork will vary directly with the factors of area, projection, sharpness of outline, marked texture, and contrast with the wall areas.

It is a weakness of present-day decoration that it so largely fails to recognize the basic importance of structure, and so largely concerns itself with what is applied and incidental, as the builders of forty years ago so largely ignored proportion and structural emphasis and concerned themselves with fussy bays, dormers, brackets, grills, shaped shingles and jig-saw applique, which to the surer taste of to-day seem in the last degree tawdry, trivial and ugly. This failure to recognize the basic importance of structure is peculiarly characteristic of our treatment of the ceiling.

The ceiling is the roof of the room, the sheltering and protecting element. In all the great decorative periods it was given a relatively elaborate treatment. The classic methods of ceiling decoration, besides being quite beyond the means of the average home owner, are for the most part rendered unfitting by the very low ceilings which, in the interests both of economy and of repose, characterize most modern homes. Ceil-

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ings treated in plaster relief or with beaming are widely used in rooms having a ceiling height of ten feet or more, and with excellent effect when they are in scale with the room and well executed; but the great number of ceilings in ordinary homes are and will continue to be of plain plaster, tinted or covered with canvas and painted. In their treatment the decorator is concerned with three factors: texture, already discussed; tone; and support.

The ceiling must seem to the mind to have some body and weight, since in the modern house it is to be regarded not as the sky above the room but rather as its roof. The very common practice of making the ceiling perfectly smooth and of doing it in white or pale cream regardless alike of its actual height and of the coloring and tone of the walls often results not only in sharp tone contrasts by which the mind is more or less consciously perturbed, but also in the loss of the sense of sheltered intimacy. Making the ceiling slightly rougher—for example, by covering it with cloth and painting it in oil and stippling—and keeping it a little lower in tone, according to a formula to be stated in the chapter on light and shade, makes it seem heavier and therefore more satisfactory to the mind, while at the same time it prevents an inartistic contact with the walls.

Whatever its tone, the ceiling must seem to be adequately supported. This requires the use of a supporting molding of some kind at the point where the ceiling appears to rest on the sidewall. The position, depth, projection and ornamental character of this member

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will naturally depend upon the proportions of the room and upon its function and decorative motive, and it ought in every case to be determined by a competent architectural designer. In any case the cornice molding must appear in its turn to be adequately sup-

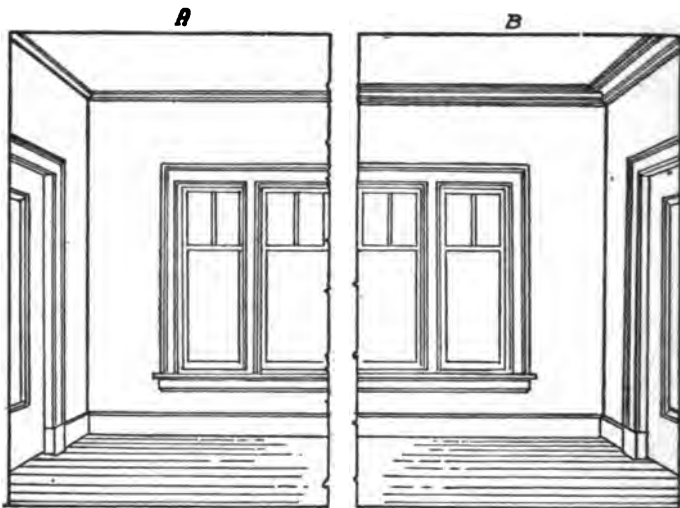


FIGURE 35.—Note the effect of structural adequacy produced by the addition of the cornice (B). The effect would be still more satisfactory as the result of an increase in the height and projection of the base-board.

ported. Nothing is more disturbing, and few things more commonly experienced, than the consciousness of a cornice which seems heavy enough amply to support the ceiling, but is itself quite unsupported and apparently suspended in the air.

Where the walls are paneled the ceiling support is

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of course adequate, as it is where over-mantel and over-doors are extended to the cornice, following the general practice in rooms of importance. In ordinary rooms this apparent support will be afforded either by the walls or by the openings, or by both. The mind

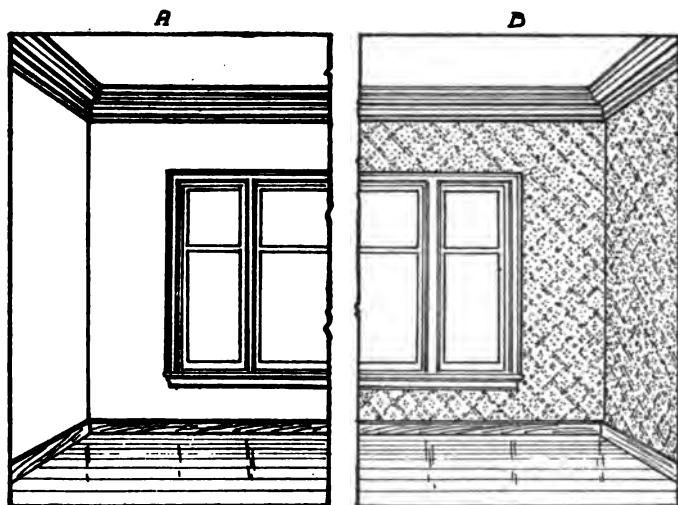


FIGURE 36.—A heavy cornice causes plain walls to appear weak and inadequate. Note also the effect of weakness due to the very low base-board, and the unpleasant effect of dividing the wall improperly in the placement of windows.

unconsciously regards the wall of a room as an order, or combination of architectural factors necessary to hold up the solids over an opening, and it demands either that the wall itself seem to possess the strength essential to this office or that it be performed by the openings. In the latter case



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the windows set off by their draperies seem to act as columns which support the cornice and ceiling. Here the impression of strength conveyed by the pillars of classic architecture is expressed by the draperies, which must, of course, fall to the floor; and the deeper the folds of the fabric the more marked will be the shadows they cast and the greater the impression of strength.

Where the walls are depended upon for apparent support for the cornice and ceiling they must be strengthened by relatively dark color or marked texture or pattern, or by two or three of these factors in combination. In this case the hangings do not require to be hung to the floor. They may, if desired, be made of light textures and stopped at the bottom of the apron; but they must be definitely related either to the walls or to the windows. The common practice of stopping them arbitrarily at a point nine or twelve or fifteen inches below the sill ignores their structural character and leaves the mind perturbed and unconvinced.

The present vogue of plain walls has much to recommend it; yet it often results in bad decoration because, like every other vogue, it often disregards considerations of fitness. The predominance of plain as opposed to ornamented surfaces results naturally in effects that are fine and delicate, but that easily become thin and poor when overemphasized; while the predominance of ornamented as opposed to plain surfaces makes for a breadth and richness of effect that easily develops when overemphasized into complexity and confusion. It is therefore clear that plain walls, set off by hang-

## *Proportion*

ings, furniture and objects of art, accord excellently with relatively small rooms and relatively light coloring; but that when the rooms are large, the colors low, and the requirements of structural emphasis pronounced, plain walls lack the strength to support the cornice and ceiling unless they are either paneled or invested with a marked effect of rough or open texture, whether through the use of plaster, paper or cloth. In every case where there is any room for doubt as to its structural adequacy a texture paper should be tried in position before it is chosen, since it will often be found that nothing less than pattern, of a size and emphasis proportioned to the scale of the room, will prove adequate for its structural requirements.

The preference for plain walls, as for plain rugs and plain hangings, is largely based upon the belief that they are more restful than figured walls, make a more sympathetic background for the other decorations, and cause the room to appear larger. This belief is only partially warranted. In the degree that plain walls are smooth and shiny they are unrestful and unsympathetic. In the degree that either walls or floor coverings are in sharp contrast in hue, tone or texture with the objects that appear against them, they tend to reduce the apparent size of the room. Moreover, it is to be remembered that furniture of ugly or eccentric outline is emphasized and thrown into an unwelcome relief by plain walls, and reduced to relative impotence by repeating but inconspicuous pattern; and, finally, that in the degree that the room

## *The Principles of Interior Decoration*

is filled with furniture of many styles, its unity must be emphasized in every practicable manner. As we have seen, the simplest way to emphasize the unity of a room is to cover its background surfaces with a repeating pattern.

Proportion as it affects the distribution of tones, hues and ornament will be discussed in later chapters. No discussion of any phase of the subject can, however, be more than helpfully suggestive. An accurate sense of proportion demands that certain powers of perception and comparison be strengthened, and they can no more be strengthened by reading about proportion than the body can be strengthened by reading about the Petersen exercises or the Swoboda system. The eye and the mind must be trained by long observation and study of beautiful forms in nature and in art to perceive the subtle spatial relationships, hidden utterly from the untrained eye, upon which beauty and significance, in decoration as in all the arts, so largely depend.

## CHAPTER X

### BALANCE

**W**HEN a man stands still, his body erect, his mind tranquil and at ease, he is in balance. The two sides of his body, similarly grouped on either side of an ideal perpendicular center, are similarly affected by the force of gravity, with a resulting state of equilibrium. This state of equilibrium, with its accompanying sense of rest, poise and finished activity, is emotionally as well as physically pleasing. It is the state to which mind and body alike tend naturally and constantly to return after periods of effort, activity and excitement.

As would be expected, this instinctive feeling for balance conditions our artistic judgments. Because the state of equilibrium is inevitably associated by the mind with effects of repose and tranquillity, while lack of equilibrium is associated with effects of activity and excitement, we expect to find in any work of art a balanced opposition of one part to another in the degree that the work is designed to suggest the ideas of quiescence, tranquillity and repose, as opposed to those of movement, activity and excitement. And since the latter motives can legitimately play no part in the architecture of a room, and but very small part

## *The Principles of Interior Decoration*

in its decorative treatment, while the former necessarily play a very large part, we expect to find the important architectural and decorative elements of a furnished room so grouped that the room ~~appears to~~ be in a state of equilibrium. That is, we expect to find the room in balance, and we are perturbed and uncomfortable when we do not so find it. Rooms that lack balance lack beauty, no matter how pleasing their proportions, their coloring, and their ornamental detail.

Fundamentally, balance is a matter of mechanics, expressible in the formula  $W : W' :: A' : A$ . If equal weights are hung on a beam at opposite sides of the fulcrum or center, the beam will be in balance when the weights are placed at equal distances from the center. Unequal weights, on the contrary, will be in balance only when their distances from the center are inversely proportional to their weight. Thus a ten-pound weight six inches to the left of the fulcrum will balance an equal weight six inches to the right. If we add a five-pound weight to each side at a distance of four inches from the center the beam will still be in balance; nor will it be disturbed by the addition of any number of weights of any sizes whatever; provided always that for each weight on one side of the center an equal weight is hung at an equal distance from the center on the other.

If, however, we wish to balance the ten-pound weight at six inches from the fulcrum by means of a five-pound weight on the other side, we must, according to our formula, place the lighter weight twelve

## *Balance*

inches from the fulcrum. Thus:  $10 : 5 :: x : 6''$ ;  $5x$  equals  $60''$ ;  $x$  equals  $12''$ .

It makes no difference what weights, or how many, are hung on one side of the fulcrum, or at what distances. A balance can always be obtained by multiplying each individual weight by its distance from the fulcrum, adding the total, and then hanging the weights on the other side in such positions that their total of weight multiplied by distance will add up to the same amount.

In mechanics an actual fulcrum or center of rotation is of course necessary. In interior decoration an ideal fulcrum is provided by the normal functioning of the eye. Our eyes are so formed that at a given instant they can see distinctly only the small area upon which they are focused, while everything else lying within the general field of vision is seen more or less indistinctly. Thus when we look at a wall we see clearly but one small part of it. In order to gain a clear impression of the whole wall our eyes must constantly move up and down and from side to side. As a result of these processes of adjustment our eyes tend to fixate the center of the wall, since this position gives us the clearest possible impression of the whole area. Thus when we look at one of the walls in a room the various windows, doors, cabinets, chairs, tables, pictures and other decorative features appearing against the wall are in effect arranged on either side of the center like weights on either side of a fulcrum. Each feature exerts upon the mind an attractive force analogous to the pull of gravity upon the scale, and

## *The Principles of Interior Decoration*

the total of all the forces upon one side is opposed to the total of all those upon the other. By the law of its nature the mind is bound to attend to the stronger force. It is inclined toward the side of the more powerful stimulus quite as inevitably as the beam is inclined toward the heavier weight. If the total of attractive forces on one side seems greater than the total of those on the other, the mind is conscious of an esthetically unpleasing sense of unrest and strain, akin to that experienced when the body leans from the perpendicular to right or left, or when a weight is borne in one hand while the other remains empty. But when the various features have been so adjusted that the opposing totals seem to be equal in their power of attraction the mind is at ease, and is conscious of an esthetically pleasing sense of equipoise, tranquillity and freedom from effort. It demands, in the furnished room, to be conscious of this balance as between the two sides of each wall with the center of the wall as a fulcrum; between the two sides of the room with the longitudinal axis as a fulcrum; and between the two ends with the transverse axis as a fulcrum.

If the decorative-weight, or power of attraction, possessed by the diverse features employed by the decorator varied directly with their area, their mass, or any other measurable factors, every problem in decorative balance would be a mechanical problem, solvable by a simple application of the formula of balance. Unhappily the matter is not so simple. Decorative weight depends upon many factors—upon size, shape, color, tone, texture, and particularly upon

## *Balance*

contrast—and the interrelations of these several factors make the problems of estimating them difficult and far beyond the possibility of mechanical calculation. They must for the most part be felt, not computed. In this process there is no substitute for a cultivated taste.

The decorative weight of the various objects in a room will vary, other things being equal, directly with their mass; or, rather, with their mass as affected by the laws of linear perspective. Thus two windows three feet by six feet will, if uncurtained, have the same weight; and this weight will be practically equal to that of a bookcase of the same width and height. In judging of the effect of mass or area the mind attaches a superior importance to width as opposed to height. Thus a bookcase four feet wide and five feet high would weigh less, in a decorative sense, than would a case five feet wide and four feet high. The weight of any object is of course increased by sharply-defined or eccentric outline, striking ornament, or distinctive coloring.

The importance of color in determining the decorative weight of an object is in part absolute, but chiefly relative. Absolutely, without reference to their background, the several hues vary in their power of attracting attention directly with warmth and purity. Thus red will outweigh any of the other hues, with orange, yellow, green, blue and violet in order; while vermilion will outweigh maroon or any red degraded by the admixture of black or white, as emerald will outweigh myrtle or Nile, and ultramarine will outweigh indigo or azure. In practice, however, the weight of a colored surface is very largely relative, and varies directly with



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its degree of contrast, in hue, tone, and texture, with the background against which it appears. Red hangings against a red wall will have less weight than hangings of old gold; while gold will have less than blue, and blue less than green. A satinwood chair, though brighter than one of mahogany, will weigh less against a champagne ground. Dark tones weigh heavily against a light background, and light tones against dark. Considered alone, a smooth texture having a high power of reflecting light will outweigh one that is loose and rough; but against a lustrous satin or damask wall a lustreless tapestry or rep chair covering will outweigh one of velvet or brocade, as Grueby pottery will outweigh porcelain.

It is evident that the difficulties of weighing the attractive forces which enter into a decorative balance tend to grow less in direct proportion to the likeness of the features, and that they disappear altogether when the balanced objects are exactly alike. To arrange a chair and a cabinet against a given wall space in such a way as to place the wall in balance may easily prove a problem. The problem becomes easier with two chairs of analogous size and shape, and progressively easier as the likenesses of the chairs in proportion, color and ornamental detail are progressively increased until, with two identical chairs, it becomes purely mechanical and could be solved by a child with a tape measure.

In decoration, then, as in mechanics, we have to do with two kinds of balance: that produced by arranging identical or closely analogous elements at equal dis-

## Balance

tances from a real or ideal center; and that produced by arranging elements more or less unlike at unequal distances from the center. The first type, called bi-symmetric, or formal, balance, is easy to produce and so easy to see as to be perfectly obvious. The second type, called occult, or substitutional, balance, is more difficult to produce and more or less subtle. Which is to be preferred, and why? For the general answer to these questions we must turn, as in nearly every other question of practice, to considerations of fitness to purpose.

At the outset it is to be noted that the elements which in combination make up the organic whole of a furnished room vary widely in character and function, and that they are, in fact, divisible naturally into three classes: (a) the fixed decorations; (b) the furniture; and (c) the small, unimportant pieces and decorative accessories grouped by the French under the term *décoration volante*, or flying decoration.

The fixed decorations, which include the trim, fireplace, walls, floor, ceiling, doors, and windows with their hangings, are clearly structural in character. They are not fortuitous but rather integral parts of the framework or skeleton of the room. As such they are in their effect upon the mind properly permanent, immovable and obvious, and they ought to be made to reveal these characteristics immediately and unmistakably. Clearly, therefore, the fixed decorations ought to be characterized in a marked degree by formal balance.

The furniture of most rooms is of many kinds and

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sizes. In the living room, for example, some pieces, like the piano and bookcases, are immovable and semi-structural in character; others, like the davenport and reading table, are closely related by their size and importance to the structure of the room, and by their use to the changing moods and needs of the household; still others, like the smaller chairs and tables, which lend themselves to easy grouping and regrouping, are less structural and more intimate and personal. Varying widely in function and significance, these various pieces properly enter the general balance of the room in positions ranging from the symmetrical relationships usually appropriate to the large immovable pieces down to the occult relationships suitable to the arrangement of the small and unimportant pieces.

The flying decoration is made up of small screens, footstools, stands, lamps, pictures, pottery and similar fugitive pieces whose primary function is to contribute the personal touches necessary to individualize the room, to rob it of stiffness or heaviness, give it a note of gayety and animation, and establish among all its elements a sort of *air de famille*. Accordingly, such elements ought to serve as a tonic or corrective for the room, which would without them seem heavy, over-formal or dead. To serve this end the flying decoration must, as individual pieces and as groups, be distributed in positions of occult balance more or less easily perceptible, according to the size and purpose of the room and the motive of its decorative treatment.

It is clear that the general problem of the decorator

## *Balance*

is to invest his room, as a unit, with the degree of repose and steadiness essential to comfortable living, while he at the same time invests it with whatever degree of lightness, animation and subtlety best accords with the purpose of the room and with the needs and tastes of its occupants. In other words his problem, here as everywhere, is to create an effect of unity in diversity, since in the absence of such an effect beauty cannot be made to appear in his room. Knowing that bisymmetric balance, being obvious, makes for repose and unity, while occult balance makes for animation and subtlety; and knowing that the fixed decorations, ✓ as structural elements, ought to be more obvious and the non-structural more subtle, he will naturally seek to place the walls of his room in a condition approximating rather closely to formal balance. The emphasis properly to be placed upon formal balance in the wall treatment will in general be more marked (a) in a ✓ very large room, where emphasis upon structure is necessary in order to prevent the room from appearing weak and amorphous; (b) in any room intended to be markedly restrained and formal in character; (c) in a hall, or room in which people do not linger, since such a room must be made to reveal whatever it possesses of character and interest to the passing glance; and (d) in a room to be furnished with a large number of small and widely-varying elements, since such a room tends naturally to become over-complex and confusing. While no definite formula can be adduced, we may, however, consider that in the ordinary room

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two walls symmetrically balanced will be too few and four walls too many. Three constitute the ideal toward which to work.

Where a single opening is placed at the center of a wall, or like openings at equal distances from the center, the wall will be in balance. Where a single opening is placed at any point other than the center the wall will be out of balance, and a balance must be created either bisymmetrically or substitutionally. By the latter method a group of any desired composition—say a wall table, a mirror, a bowl of flowers and a small easel picture—will be placed against the wall on the other side of the center at a point where the total group weight seems to the mind to be equal to that of the opening. By the former method a single object—say a bookcase, cabinet, or large mirror with its supporting console bracket—of a shape and size practically identical with that of the opening, is placed against the wall at an equal distance from the center. Here the mind is far less concerned with identity in height than with identity in width. It will, for example, accept a bookcase four feet wide and five feet high as a balancing weight for a window four feet wide and seven feet high; but it will not accept a hall clock seven feet high and two feet wide, or a tapestry seven feet high and five feet wide.

In the case of two unequal openings equally distant from the center the wall will be out of balance. Where the difference in width is slight the hangings of the narrower opening can be placed far enough beyond the casing to make the apparent width of the openings

## *Balance*

equal. Where this is impracticable a balance must be created substitutionally.

In the degree that the decorator finds it possible sufficiently to emphasize bisymmetrical balance in the fixed decorations of the room, he will incline toward a more occult distribution of the movables. In the degree that he finds it impossible he must minimize

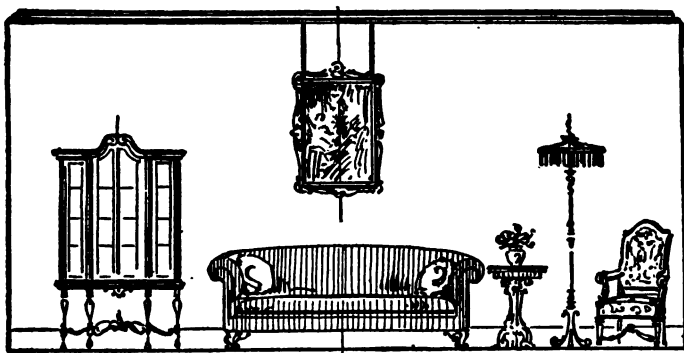


FIGURE 37.—The sofa and picture, constituting the most important element of the treatment, are in symmetrical balance. The cabinet on one side is balanced substitutionally by the composite group on the other side. Note however that a suggestion of symmetry is afforded by the fact that the cabinet and lamp are of the same height, and that their centers are equidistant from the center of the wall.

the effect of deficiencies in structure through a greater emphasis upon formal balance in the distribution of movables. Thus in a room having symmetrically placed openings on three sides and the fourth wall blank, he will be likely to arrange the features on that wall in an occult balance. If, on the other hand, the openings of two or three walls are unsymmetrically

## *The Principles of Interior Decoration*

placed, the blank wall will normally be arranged in formal balance, since such an arrangement will tend to restore the unity and repose of the whole treatment.

In formal balance the most important object will naturally be placed at the center of the wall. If there are two identical important elements they will be placed at either side of the center, at a distance determined

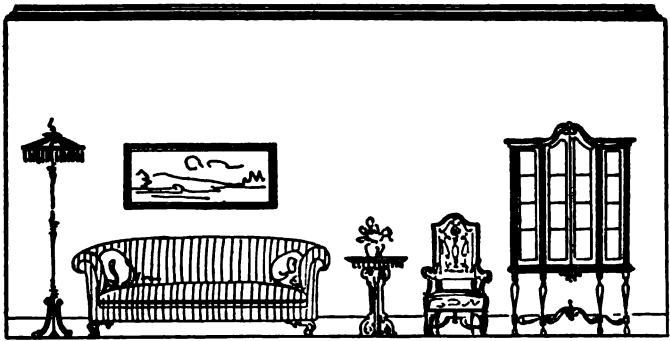


FIGURE 38.—Occult balance, poorly arranged. Note that the cabinet appears to be a little too heavy; also that both cabinet and lamp affect the mind with a sense of constraint, due to their closeness to the end walls.

by what use is to be made of the remaining wall space. In occult balance the most important object will be placed far enough from the center so that the mind will be in no doubt of the fact that it was not intended to be in the center, and at a distance determined by the decorative weight of the features on the other side, according to the formula that unequal attractions balance at distances inversely proportional to their weight.

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In the case of a large piece, like an upright piano, to be placed against a short wall, it will sometimes happen that the piece must be placed at the exact center, even though the decorator may desire to avoid by every means the appearance of formality or stiffness in the room, since the wall space available is too short to permit the use of features sufficiently numerous and heavy to produce an occult balance. In this case he

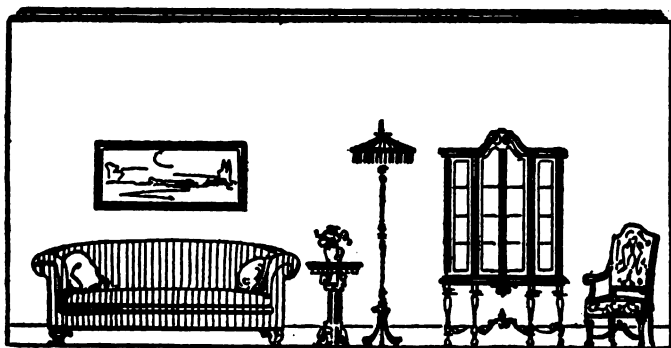


FIGURE 39.—A better arrangement of the same elements in occult balance. The decorator would in practice be justified in placing the chair so near the end wall only in the case of a window in that wall which would make the chair usable. Every arrangement of furniture must be based first of all upon a study of all the considerations of fitness to function involved.

will fill the spaces at either side with features markedly dissimilar; for example, an English card-table with some small accessories at one side and a floor lamp and chair at the other. Where the weight of one group is slightly greater than that of the other, he can restore the balance while adding to the diversity of the wall



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as a composition by placing a single small object, as a vase or plastic figure, on the piano toward the end near the lighter group.

While it is the primary function of small decorative objects and of *décoration volante* generally to individualize the room and to give it animation, snap and decorative charm, it is clear that the decorator will need to resort to formal balance in distributing these objects in rooms where the openings and heavy pieces of furniture are markedly unsymmetrical. Thus a single small piece will, if placed above the center of a wall table or cabinet, emphasize the unity and repose, not only of the piece so embellished, but also of the room as a whole. The same effect, sharply intensified, will be produced by a pair of identical objects placed at equal distances from the center. On the other hand, two, three, four, or even five small, unimportant objects may be grouped in occult balance in such a way as to increase the animation and subtlety of the whole treatment.

In considering the balanced distribution of pictures, it must be remembered at the outset that the requirements of unity demand that pictures to be hung on the same wall, or even in the same room, reveal easily perceptible likenesses. Monochromes will not ordinarily be hung with colored pictures, and, in general, water colors will not be hung with oils, or wood frames with gilt. Normally there will also be considerable similarity in subject and handling, and marked similarity in tone. Moreover, where small pictures are to be hung on a large wall space the requirements of unity demand that they be so grouped that the mind, regard-

## Balance

ing the group as a unit, will accept it as sufficiently large and important to be congruous with the wall space. In this case the pictures must be fairly close in tone to the wall, since the effect of marked tone contrast would be to emphasize the individuality of

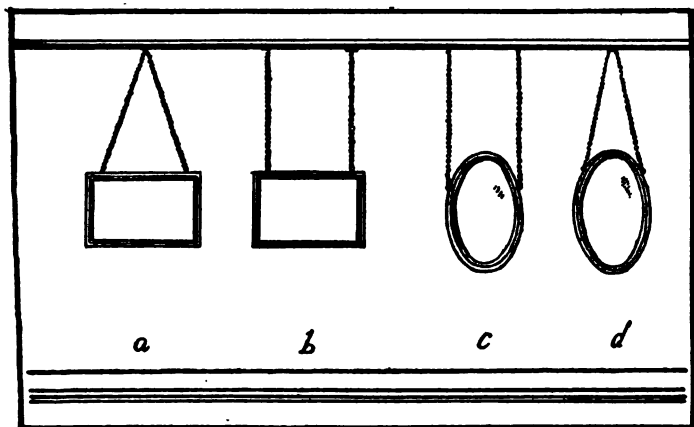


FIGURE 40.—The oblique lines created by hanging a rectangular picture as at *a* are in general objectionable because they catch the attention and lead it away from the picture to the hook. In *b* there is no such tendency, while harmony is ensured by the repetition of the straight verticals of the frame. Pictures or mirrors of curvilinear outline should however be hung as at *d*, since the method *c* breaks the rhythmic flow of line.

each small picture so sharply that the eye could not see them as a group. If all these precautions are observed, pictures may be hung according to the mechanical formula of balance, the decorative weight of each picture being based upon its surface area. It may be noted in passing that pictures should be hung

## *The Principles of Interior Decoration*

flat against the wall, the smaller ones without visible support, the larger by means of two cords or wires rising vertically from near the ends of each picture to two hooks, since it is only in the case of elliptical or circular shapes, where the cords leave the circumference at a tangent, that we are in ordinary practice justified in running the cords over a single hook. Pictures should be so hung as to place their centers of interest at eye height, and normally those hung in a horizontal line on the same wall will have their centers of interest in line, rather than the tops or bottoms of their frames.

In practice it rarely happens that a picture of any considerable decorative weight will be hung by itself. The mind demands not only lateral balance, but also a support which seems to be adequate. This demand is best satisfied by hanging the picture directly above some such other unit as a cabinet, table or chair, which rests upon the floor and is wider than the picture and therefore appears to be stronger. Moreover, the decorative value of a skillfully arranged group, which reveals the presence of unity in diversity, is so great, and the floor area of most rooms so limited, that it would in general be a waste of opportunity to use two units separately where it is possible to combine them. It must be noted that while a picture hung above another unit which rests upon the floor must be narrower than the lower member in order to insure an effect of stability in the group, in the case of two pictures hung vertically the wider or larger must be above, since the

## Balance

mind in this situation regards the lower unit as depending from and supported by the upper unit.

A large rug is as much a part of the fixed decorations as are the walls and the openings, and it must accordingly be placed symmetrically with reference to the width of the room in every case, and with reference to the length of the room in most cases. When a large rug is crowded by a projecting hearth into a markedly unsymmetrical position on the floor, the whole effect of the room is marred, and its balance can be restored only by using an all-over carpet or a number of carefully placed small rugs, or else by cutting the big rug in the manner suggested in the chapter on proportion.

When the decorator has insured the necessary structural emphasis and repose of his background surfaces by giving to the floor and to the wall spaces and openings a degree of symmetrical balance more or less marked, according to the size and motive of the room, he will proceed to invest his whole treatment with subtlety and decorative charm by a more or less marked degree of occult balance in the distribution of furniture and *décoration volante*. It is obvious that no rules can be formulated to guide him in this process, and that he must proceed experimentally. For example, in a living room having a fireplace in the middle of one side and covered by a large rug, he may wish to place a large sofa at right angles to the fireplace and toward one end of the room, and to balance it by a reading table and chair placed at right angles to the fireplace on the other side. The exact position of these pieces

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will be determined by the general arrangement and the lighting of the room, and by the tastes and convenience of its occupants. If, when the pieces are in position, the sofa seems to be too heavy for the opposing group, the decorative weight of this group must be increased by (a) moving it farther back from the center of the room; (b) keeping it in position, while the sofa is moved closer to the center of the room; or (c) keeping all the pieces in position, while adding to the decorative weight of the group by the addition of another chair, a colorful table runner, a relatively larger and more striking lamp, a row of books between book-blocks, or of some similar stimuli. If, on the other hand, the sofa seems too light, these processes will be reversed.

While the balance between opposite ends and opposite sides of a room must be clearly felt, it will be the more pleasing in the degree that it is occult rather than formal. No one wants to see the two sides of a room exactly alike; yet we cannot be free from a sense of unrest unless there is an easily apprehensible equality between the total weights of the two sides. In practice the student will find it of the utmost value to draw an accurate floor plan and elevations of his room, to a scale of one inch, or at least of one-half inch, to the foot, according to the method indicated in Figure 41. With the size and shape of the room and the distribution of voids and masses thus clearly before him, he can pencil in, according to the same scale, outlines to represent the rugs, furniture and pictures and other elements that he purposes to use in the room. These



PLATE VI.—A very carefully balanced room, to be studied in connection with the chapters on Balance, Proportion, and The Elements of Beauty. Note, for example, how the rectangular wall spaces and the round table have been related by the plaster relief ceiling.

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## *Balance*

pieces can be arranged and rearranged until their distribution finally seems satisfactory with reference to

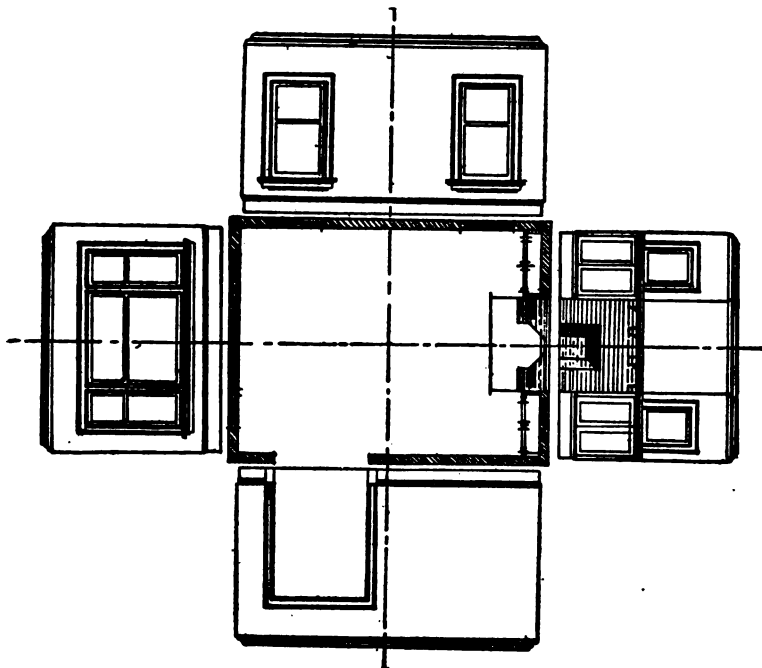


FIGURE 41.—Typical floor plan and elevations, drawn to a very small scale. The layman will probably find it more helpful in practice to omit the part of the drawing that shows the wall thickness, and to start the four elevations from the inner floor line.

both axes of the room. The effectiveness of the device can be increased by washing in the principal colors, and by folding up the four elevations to form enclosing walls.



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It would be fruitless to extend further the discussion of balance as it conditions the arrangement of the movables in a room, since such a discussion could of necessity deal only in generalities, while the complex of personal and architectural factors, different for each room, makes the problem presented by each room unique. The principles laid down indicate the general method of arrangement, and innumerable illustrations in books and magazines afford a wide field for suggestive study. This study will be made more fruitful by following the plan outlined above; but a perfect or even a fairly excellent arrangement can rarely be attained except as the result of much experiment. In most of the processes of house-furnishing experiment is costly, since it involves discarding some things and buying others. In experimenting with effects of balance no expenditure is demanded save that of time and effort, while the gains, both in the beauty of the room and in the growth of creative power in the decorator, are always considerable and frequently astonishing.

The balance of color is qualitative rather than quantitative. A small area of a given color in one situation will effectively balance a large area in an opposing situation. Thus a small chair will balance in color a large davenport, as a lamp shade or a vase will balance a pair of hangings or a table cover. Color balance will be treated at greater length in the chapter on color harmony, while the balanced distribution of light and shade so essential to the comfort and distinction of a room will be discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER XI

### LIGHT AND SHADE

**W**E all recognize the importance of *chiaroscuro* in painting, of stage lighting in the drama, and even of lights and shadows in exterior architecture. Strangely enough, however, very few of us realize adequately the importance of light and shade as esthetic factors in the decoration of interiors.

Light is life. It stimulates and excites, while darkness is lethargic and depressing. Our vital energies flow and ebb with alterations in the intensity and the brilliancy of the light. Hence we must expect to find that our esthetic reactions are similarly affected by the same factors. In point of fact, light not only makes the beauty of harmonious coloring possible in our rooms, but by itself, apart from color, it gives them vitality, atmosphere, and emotional significance. Its life-giving, warming qualities make it a factor of tremendous importance in the art of decoration, where it enters into every problem of composition and concurs in the proper expression of every emotional idea.

One who wishes to prove experimentally, and in his own person, the power of light and darkness to affect his emotional states, has only to step out of doors

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before the dawn of a summer's day, and to remain out until after the fall of night. He will find that in the cold and feeble light which precedes the dawn his spirits fall, his mood becomes depressed. As the sky grows grayer and lighter the mood tends to pass, and with the first direct rays of the rising sun it is instantly succeeded by a feeling of gladness and elation. The flood of physical and psychical energies thus released by the power of the light seems, as the sun rises toward the zenith, to increase with the increasing quantity and brilliancy of the light.

In time, however, a point will be reached where increasing intensity of illumination has no further power to stimulate. Once this point has been passed the light becomes dazzling, fatiguing, finally even painful. When, with the approach of sunset, the brilliant light is softened and reduced, he will feel a sense of quiet well-being, of serenity and poise. After sunset, tired by the activities and excitement of the day, he will welcome the peace and calm of the shadows. But as the early shadows pass into the obscurity of night the peculiar power of the dark will again assert itself. Again his mood will become sober, then somber, and in time depressed.

Brilliant light, like pure color, rapidly exhausts nervous energy. It is fatiguing physically and unendurable esthetically. The decorator must see to it that his rooms receive plenty of light, but he must also see to it that adequate means are provided to soften and dim this light when necessary, and to alter the amount admitted at each opening easily and at will.

## *Light and Shade*

Only in this way can the room be made pleasant under all conditions of natural light, and adjusted perfectly to the changing moods of its occupants, which will demand, both for physical comfort and for esthetic enjoyment, wide and relatively frequent changes in the quantity as well as in the intensity of the light.

In practice this means that the windows of most rooms should be provided with thin undercurtains, which will serve to temper the glare of over-brilliant sunlight by day, and to give to the room so curtained a suggestion of reticence and an esthetic quality of softness and subtlety otherwise absent, while at night they hide the bleak or black rectangles revealed by uncurtained windows, or the no less unpleasant drawn shades. Undercurtains may be made of net, muslin, silk tissue, casement cloth, or any other thin material, and they may be, and very often are, mounted on small brazed or bone rings and a rod, so that they can be easily drawn or pushed back when it is desired to make the most of the morning sun, or to reveal a fine view.

In addition to the undercurtains, which temper the light but are incapable of excluding it altogether, most windows require either shades or hangings made to draw easily across the entire window, in order that the light may be properly within the control of the decorator. In point of beauty and distinction the movable hangings are of course to be preferred. Their cost is, however, very much greater than that of shades, while they do not in fact control the light so perfectly as do properly made shades. In any case, apart from any

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considerations of color, line or texture, some method of controlling the light is absolutely essential for esthetic no less than for practical reasons, and the decorator must not permit himself to be carried away by the crochetty but rather widespread notion that the light should never be altered, and that there is a peculiar preciousness and virtue in making the inside of one's home as much as possible like the outdoors at all times and seasons.

↳ The quantity and intensity of illumination desirable in a given room depends chiefly upon its purpose and the motive of its decorative treatment. In the degree that a room is to be used primarily for rest after labor and for recuperation from the effects of activity and excitement the amount and brilliancy of the light should be reduced to the minimum required for the physical comfort of the eye; while in the degree that it is to be a scene of animation and gayety, occupied by people who have energies to expend and who demand joyousness, vivacity and social contact, the amount and brilliancy of the light must be increased to the maximum permitted by the physical comfort of the eye. This principle conditions lighting both by day and by night, though it often happens that a given room will serve somewhat different needs by day and by night, and will accordingly require a different intensity of illumination. In its effect upon our comfort, and particularly upon our emotional states, artificial lighting is even more important than natural lighting, for we use artificial light at the end of the day, when work or worry have made their inevitable changes in our nerv-

## *Light and Shade*

ous condition, and when the stimulating power of bright light and the calming power of dim light must be used skillfully in order to correct or to confirm our moods.

Light in a room may be either direct or indirect. That is, it may reach the eye directly from its source, or it may be reflected and diffused by the walls, ceiling, or other surfaces of the room, the illuminating agent remaining out of sight. The dynamic, vitalizing power of light is peculiar to radiant light. Reflected light does not possess it. Thus a room lighted by reflected or diffused sunlight, though it may be cheerful and serene, can never possess the joyous, animating quality of a room which receives the direct rays of the sun. Nor can indirect artificial light, no matter how powerful its source, kindle a sense of gayety and excitement. There would be the same difference between a ballroom lighted, however skillfully, by the indirect method, and one lighted by crystal chandeliers, that there would be between dance music played with open and with muted strings. Indeed, the charm of any room depends largely upon the skillful use of radiant light. By night this light may come chiefly from ceiling fixtures, or from wall brackets, or from lamps. It may flood the whole room, as in a ballroom, or it may, as in a living room, be so shaded as to illuminate merely the keyboard of the piano, the corner of a reading table, or the arm of an easy chair. But unless there is somewhere the gleam of light radiated directly from its source, there can be no vivacity or brilliancy of effect.

It is clear that the illumination of a given room will

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depend, first, upon the amount and character of the light admitted to the room by day or generated therein by night, and, secondly, upon the relative luminosity and power of reflection of the surfaces by which the light is diffused. If little light is admitted or generated the room will be relatively dark; and if little light is reflected the room will still be relatively dark, however great the amount of light admitted. Whatever light finds its way into a room is reflected and diffused chiefly by the walls and ceiling, and this diffusion will vary in direct proportion to the luminosity, height of tone, and smoothness of texture of those surfaces. Smooth white walls will yield a maximum reflection of light, and rough black walls a minimum. Between these two extremes the gamut of grays will vary in luminosity according to the amount of black in the mixture.

Textures vary widely in their power of reflecting light. Nearly all wall papers absorb more light than does paint, because of their relatively open textures; but the variations among different classes of papers, as among different classes of cloth fabrics, are too irregular to admit of classification. It is always wise in practice to test a given texture under the light with which it is to be used, if there is the least doubt as to how it will act. In general, it will be found that any paper or fabric, hung in large areas, will look distinctly darker than the sample looked in the shop, so that the total effect of the room will be lower in tone than was expected.

The differences in luminosity among the various



*Courtesy of Gill & Reigate Ltd., London.*

**PLATE VII.**—Finely-designed wing chair, revealing sound proportions and a rhythmic flow of like curves. Note that this curve is echoed in the covering; that the pattern, which serves to enrich the chair, is set off by contrast with the plain outside back and arms; and that the structural lines are defined by a properly made gimp.





## Light and Shade

hues, apart from considerations of tone and texture, are very great. These differences are illustrated graphically, though with approximate accuracy only,

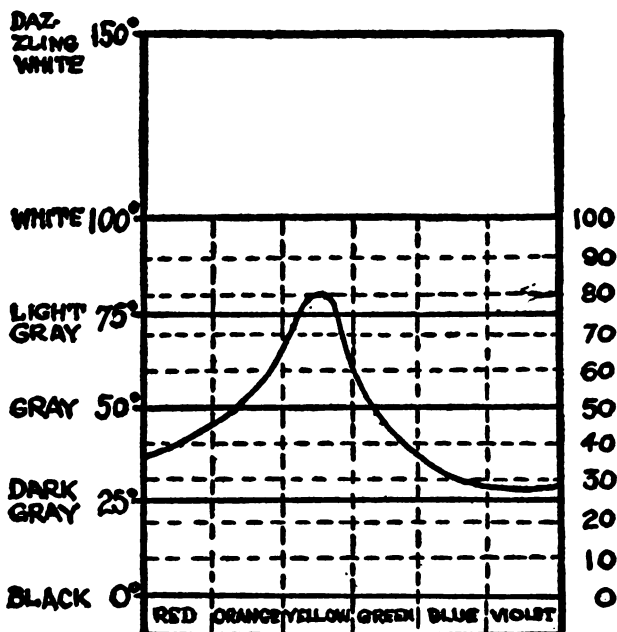


FIGURE 42.—Curve representing graphically the relative luminosity of the spectrum hues in their normal intensity.

in Figure 42. Study of the curve of luminosity reveals, for example, that normal red, violet and blue reflect very little light, while normal yellow reflects a great amount; that yellow-orange is almost four times as luminous as red-orange; yellow-green six

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times as luminous as blue-green; while normal yellow is almost twenty times as luminous as normal red. Inasmuch as the luminosity of the light-reflecting surfaces is a factor which largely determines the amount of light, either natural or artificial, necessary to bring a room up to a desired degree of illumination, it is evident that the importance of this factor in choosing the color of background surfaces can hardly be over-estimated. Where the amount of light available by day is limited by the situation or fenestration of the room, or the amount available by night is limited by considerations of economy, luminous colors and firm, smooth and light-reflecting textures must be chosen.

In determining the nature and distribution of light desirable in a given room, and the height of tone desirable in its various colored surfaces, the general problem of the decorator is five-fold. He must determine (a) the intensity and character of illumination most fitting for the particular room to be lighted; (b) the height of tone desirable for the background surfaces; (c) the distribution of light and dark tones as to position in the room; (d) their distribution as to relative area; and (e) the distance by which the principal and secondary tones must be separated in order to yield the maximum esthetic effect.

The first consideration was discussed in an earlier paragraph of this chapter, wherein it appeared that within the limits imposed by the physical comfort of the eye the amount and brilliancy of the light desirable in a given room will depend upon the function of the



PLATE VIII.—Wing chair in which the flow of curved line is abruptly broken by the use of straight legs and base. Note the difference in richness between plain and ornamented surfaces by comparing this chair with the one in Plate VII.



## *Light and Shade*

room, and hence upon the motive of its decorative treatment.

If we conceive of the entire range of values from carbon black to the dazzling white of the diamond or of sunlit snow as forming a scale of one hundred and fifty degrees, with black at 0 and dazzling white at 150, the white of white paper or white paint will lie at 100, gray at 50, dark gray at 25, and light gray at 75, as

in Figure 43. On this scale light gray appears midway between the two extremes, and while colored surfaces having the luminosity of light gray are markedly brighter than those characteristic of outdoor nature, long experiment and observation have shown that they are most agreeable when used indoors. Light gray seems to be the degree of brightness which the eye finds least fatiguing, and to which our nerves seem best adapted. Since the walls lie immediately before the eye, the wall colors, whatever their hues, will normally approximate rather closely to light gray in tone. We will lower the tone of the walls in rooms where a marked effect of tranquillity is aimed at, and raise it in rooms where a marked effect of gayety and animation is desired. But in general this is the ideal toward which the decorator will work; and in

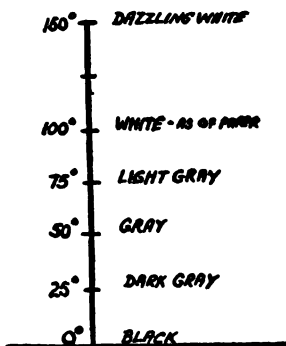


FIGURE 43. — A scale of tone relationships, from black, as of black paint, to the white of sunlit snow or the diamond.

least fatiguing, and to which our nerves seem best adapted. Since the walls lie immediately before the eye, the wall colors, whatever their hues, will normally approximate rather closely to light gray in tone. We will lower the tone of the walls in rooms where a marked effect of tranquillity is aimed at, and raise it in rooms where a marked effect of gayety and animation is desired. But in general this is the ideal toward which the decorator will work; and in

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so working he is concerned, as we have just noted, with two important factors: the amount of natural or artificial light available, and the luminosity of the hues with which he works.

As to the distribution of light and shade according to position in the room, the fundamental fact here as everywhere in decorative composition is that beauty can appear only in the presence of unity in variety; and here, as everywhere, unity must be insured through the repetition of like elements and the predominance of one element. This consideration was discussed in the chapter on contrast, wherein it appeared that in the treatment of the background surfaces of the room three zones or registers of closely-related tones best satisfy the requirements of the mind, with the darkest zone at the floor, the lightest at the ceiling, and the mid-zone on the walls. It remains to ascertain what relative areas best please the mind, and how far apart in tone the three zones should be.

Sir Joshua Reynolds noted that the great Venetian colorists gave about one-fourth of each canvas to the lights, including the principal and secondary lights, about one-fourth to the shadows, and the remaining one-half to the mid-tones. This constitutes an excellent ideal toward which to work in interior decoration. In superficial area, before color is applied, the floor and ceiling of a room are equal, and together they are approximately equal to the wall area, including the openings. In practice there is wide room for variations in these proportions. The area of darks is reduced by

## *Light and Shade*

the margin around the rug unless the floor is stained to a dark tone, and increased by dark furniture and furniture coverings and hangings; while the area of mid-tones is of course correspondingly reduced. Accordingly, it is the problem of the decorator—and a very simple one, if well considered—to choose and distribute his light and dark tones, of whatever hue, in such a way that the half-tones are plainly preponderant and as nearly as practicable equal to the total of both light and dark.

For example, in a room eighteen feet long, twelve feet wide, and nine feet high, the floor and ceiling areas would be 216 square feet each, or a total of 432 square feet, and the total wall areas, including the openings, 540 square feet. If the walls were done in tan of the luminosity of light gray, the ceiling in light cream, and the floor in golden brown of the luminosity of gray, while the windows were curtained with net or casement cloth to match the walls in tone, the half-tones would be clearly dominant and, in fact, considerably in excess of the esthetic requirement. If, however, four windows and two doors to adjoining rooms were hung with draperies to match the carpet in tone, averaging twenty-four square feet of exposed surface to each opening, and if the piano, bookcase and chairs appearing against the walls were of dark wood and had an aggregate of fifty square feet, the total of lights and darks would exceed 600 square feet, while the total of half-tones would be less than 350 square feet. In fact, the darks alone would slightly exceed the half-tones, thus destroying the unity and marring the beauty



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of the room by eliminating the dominant element. In this situation it would be necessary to substitute lighter hangings—for example, a printed linen of which one-fourth only of the area was dark—or to resort to some similar device or devices to correct the faulty distribution of the first arrangement.

In reference to the last consideration, it may be noted again that tone contrasts, whether between two background areas, between a decorative object and its background, or among the parts of a single unit, ought to be clearly perceptible but not so sharp that the mind fails to perceive as well the elements of tone likeness. A room in which the tone contrast between floor and wall or wall and ceiling is too slight, is in general only less unpleasant than one in which it is too marked. In the one case there is an effect of instability and lack of poise; in the other, of abruptness and lack of suavity. In order to enter most effectively into a harmony the three background surfaces, whatever their hues, should be about twenty-five degrees, or, in special situations, twenty or even fifteen degrees apart in tone. Thus colors having the luminosity of gray, light gray and gray-white, or of dark gray, gray and light gray, combine harmoniously when used on the floor, walls and ceiling, respectively. Of course this is not to be taken as an invariable rule, for there are no invariable rules in artistic practice. It is frequently modified widely to suit particular requirements, as when a ceiling is darkened to give strength or repose to a room, or when black and white or very dark and very light are used together in the decoration of a sun room or some other



**PLATE IX.**—A drawing room characterized by pleasing textures and tone relationships, the latter somewhat altered in the photograph. The restraint of the paneled background is relieved and endowed with a quality of animation and buoyancy by small, slenderly-proportioned furniture, and by the free use of warm color in the accessories.

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## *Light and Shade*

little-used apartment for the sake of vigor or brilliancy of effect; but in general it is a safe guide to restful and permanently agreeable results.

In the secondary contrasts between backgrounds and ornamental objects the two tones ought not in general to be more than fifty degrees apart. White, for example, emphasizes the effectiveness of gray. Cream white woodwork sets off reseda or tan walls having the luminosity of light gray, as well as dark reseda or brown rugs of the luminosity of gray; but when the contrasting tones are farther apart than white and gray—that is, more than fifty degrees on our scale—the effect is too abrupt for repose and beauty. The combination of black and white is very hard, and, notwithstanding the refreshing quality of the work done by Professor Hoffman and other European decorators, black and white rooms are too harsh for common use. Where black and white are employed in the same composition they should normally be separated by graduated intermediate tones, which make the transition by perceptible degrees of likeness. The general principle, governing all secondary contrasts of tone, as well as contrasts of hue, line, and form, is that the vivacity of a decorative treatment increases directly with the number and intensity of the contrasts. Sharper tone contrasts give to a room increased snap and animation, up to the point where unity of effect is lost, and complexity degenerates into confusion.

The decorator must not only arrange his light and dark color values in an orderly arrangement from top to bottom; he must also, as far as practicable, so group

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the furnishings of his room that light tones are put with light, and dark with dark. This process of massing, as it is called by the painters, gives when skillfully carried out an effect of spaciousness, order and dignity quite impossible when furniture, hangings, upholsteries, screens, lamps and other colored objects are so placed that the lights and darks appear in small sharply contrasting masses and much divided. The hit-and-miss distribution of high and low values invariably perplexes and fatigues the eye and affects the mind with a sense of incoherence and disturbance, and the effect of spottiness and confused activity produced by the contrasts destroys the repose of the room, vulgarizes its decorative treatment, and robs it of distinction and charm.

A room gains in distinction and charm not only in the degree that the tones are so massed as to give breadth rather than spottiness of effect, but also in the degree that the illumination both by day and by night is so controlled as to divide the room, as a well-painted picture is divided, into areas of high and low illumination. Under natural light this effect must be achieved through a carefully studied arrangement of curtains, shades and hangings, and at night through a careful choice and arrangement of lamps with their shades. In this, as in other questions of decorative practice, principality is a first consideration. There must not be two equal areas of equal intensity of illumination. One area must be either larger or more brightly lighted than the other or others.

In planning the choice and arrangement of color in

## *Light and Shade*

areas of low illumination, the decorator must remember that the hues do not lose character at the same rate with failing light. Red, which is so powerful a color in full light, fades into gray and deadens toward black most quickly, followed in order by yellow and green, while blue retains its character longest. Thus in a multi-colored composition we must expect to find the color relations characteristic of full light altered perceptibly when the light is dimmed by shaded lamps. The warm and brilliant hues will approach dark gray, while the cold hues will be changed but little.

It is also to be remembered that, even with modern electric lamps, there is a considerable difference between natural and artificial light, and that accordingly all colors to be used by night must be chosen with the modifications likely to be caused by artificial light in mind. While the only safe way is to try the actual fabric to be used under the lights of the room in which it is to be used, it may be noted as a general guide that all colored objects tend to appear black if lighted only by a color which they do not possess. There is much yellow and very little blue in the light of candles, oil lamps and gas jets, and for that reason, while red, orange and yellow surfaces illuminated by such a light will be changed but little, blue will appear either greenish or blackish, according to the amount of green or violet in it; while violet will appear either grayish or reddish brown, according to the amount of blue or red in it.

The whole matter of proper illumination is of the very greatest importance, not only practically but

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artistically. Both the comfort and the beauty of our rooms are more largely dependent upon the amount, character and distribution of the light than most of us suspect. However, the subject is too large for treatment here, and the student must look to other sources—particularly to the studies of Luckiesh, which are available in every library—for a more complete discussion. In point of fact, the distribution of light and of light and dark color in a room involves so many factors which are peculiar to that room and to its occupants that the happiest results can usually be attained only through experiment. The decorator must often arrange and rearrange until the arrangement finally satisfies. The difference in distinction and beauty between a perfect and a mediocre arrangement is so great that whatever time and energy is spent in experiment will be richly rewarded.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE DOMINANT HUE

**I**N a study of this character, necessarily brief and necessarily didactic in method, it is difficult to say anything at all without saying too much. This difficulty is especially perplexing in the matter of color, where all is relative and nothing absolute, and where every rule is subject to numberless exceptions. However, we have at least a fixed point of departure, for we know that whatever colors are used in the decoration of a room, and however they are used, one among them must be dominant. That is, one hue must seem to give color character to the room, to make the strongest demand upon the attention, and to exercise the strongest influence upon the emotions. This it may do through superiority either in area or in intensity, or in both.

A hue may be made dominant through either of two general methods, which will be studied at some length in the chapter on color harmony. By the first method it is made a constituent of most of the other colors by a process of infusion, and appears on all the principal surfaces of the room in more or less subtle variations. By the second method it is used in relatively pure form on small areas, while the walls and ceiling



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are covered with grayed-out, almost neutral tones, either of the hue itself or of its complementary. Choice of the method will be determined in practice by artistic considerations.. Choice of the hue will be determined by practical considerations of fitness to purpose. Among these considerations the four of chief importance are (a) the purpose or character of the room; (b) the nature and amount of the light; (c) personal preference; and (d) the amount of money available.

Choice of the dominant hue is in a considerable measure influenced by the purpose of the room. Each decorative treatment ought, as we have seen, to be built around a motive; and while the motive of a given room must be expressed through the convergent power of many different factors, the one most readily available, most easily emphasized, and most subtle in its effect, is the power of hue.

Of course purity and luminosity are factors but little less important than hue itself, and in some situations more important. Qualities which are sober, permanent and inactive are expressed in some degree by the low values of any hue, as those which are gay, sprightly or transient are expressed by the high values. In careful work, however, the decorator must add to the power of tone the peculiar power of hue. For example, in composition both pale blue and pale red express a measure of daintiness as well as a measure of gayety; but as a dominant hue there is in pale blue a suggestion of reticence and fastidiousness which makes it peculiarly the color of daintiness, and in pink an ardent quality which makes it peculiarly the color of gayety

*Courtesy of Gill & Reigate Ltd., London*

PLATE X.—This table is an excellent illustration of the proper relation of vertical curves to the weight supported by them. (Compare Figure 5.) Note also the manner in which ornament is related to structure.



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## *The Dominant Hue*

and abandon. This by no means implies that pale blue must always be used to express daintiness, but only the highest degree of daintiness; as dark blue must be used to express the highest degree of tranquillity, or pale yellow to express the highest degree of animation and buoyancy. In ordinary situations the decorator can produce his effects in any one of several different ways, because he is aiming at moderation. As the degree of emphasis aimed at is increased, the methods by which the desired effect can be produced are correspondingly diminished, and when the extreme emphasis is desired the unique means through which it can be produced must be employed.

Red may be made to concur, as the dominant hue, in effects of warmth, of hospitality, of richness and splendor, and of excitement and activity. Obviously it is a poor bedroom color, nor can it often be used as the dominant color in the living room. It is, other considerations permitting, excellent in the hall, library or dining room.

In a hall not too brightly lighted, red gives a fine atmosphere of warmth and dignified welcome. Where the walls are paneled, or papered with a stripe or a simple diaper pattern, a rich-red figured rug, either an Oriental or a good copy, can be used effectively on the floor, while the red of its ground can be matched in the portières and in a plain or self-toned stair runner. Where the walls are covered with a damask or tapestry, or papered with verdure, landscape, or large-figured flock or duplex paper, a self-toned red rug will ordinarily be better, with hangings and stair runner to

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match. Here the walls can be almost any neutral, from warm gray to walnut. The strong, rich red will bring everything in the room under its dominance.

While we know that the library is used at all seasons of the year, and in many houses at all hours of the day, most of us, when we attempt in imagination to picture a library, see it on a winter's night, when the glow of an open fire plays over the rug and reveals the shadowy outlines of the bookcases and the dim folds of velvet draperies, and a deep-shaded lamp throws a beam of soft light over the arm of a big reading chair. And in this ideal library the color is always red—deep red in the rug and hangings, orange and vermillion in the flames, rose-red in the glow of the lamp shades, old reds in bookbindings and hunting prints.

It is the same with the dining room. We know the soft coolness of blue and silver, the restful freshness of reseda and ivory; yet when we think of the ideal dinner—of the soft lights, the hospitable warmth, the sparkle of crystal, the gleam of silver, the quick talk and gay laughter of the guests—we think of red, for the color is indissolubly bound in thought with the ideas of warmth, richness, hospitality and excitement.

Here we have to do with the question of temperament. To some of us it is the intensity of an emotion that counts, not its duration, and life is chiefly precious for its golden hours. To others the ideal state is the one that can be evenly maintained, and a decorative treatment always mildly pleasing is better than one which, however perfect for its hour or season, is less pleasing for a great part of the time.

## *The Dominant Hue*

Present-day practice has worked out a method through which one can both eat his cake and keep it. The character of a red dining room or library may be changed in half an hour by covering the hangings and chairs with slip covers of cretonne, and by this simple and inexpensive device the room may be adapted alternately to summer and winter weather, while each change by contrast gives a new charm.

Yellow can be used as a dominant hue in any room, though it seems most fitting in the drawing room and breakfast room, and least fitting in the bedroom. The peculiar excellence of yellow lies in its cheerful and even joyous animation, its defect in an impersonal quality that makes it difficult to use in any apartment in which an effect of intimacy or *camaraderie* is aimed at.

Yellow is the most adaptable of all the colors. It is effective in all values, from the palest cream to the darkest yellow-brown, and is equally at home in the cheapest or the most sumptuous surroundings. A drawing room may be done in paneled and painted ivory walls, old Chinese rugs, yellow damask hangings, satin-wood and lacquered furniture and costly bric-à-brac, as a living room may be done in yellow calcimined walls, Sundour or cretonne hangings, fumed oak and willow furniture and inexpensive bric-à-brac—provided, of course, that the things are good in line and color—and the result will in each case be happy. Where yellow is made dominant in any room except the drawing room or breakfast room, the choice is usually determined by some other consideration than the purpose of the room.

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As a dominant hue blue seems best adapted by nature to the bedroom, and least adapted to the breakfast room. It may be made dominant in any of the other rooms, though its coldness makes it a somewhat inhospitable color for the hall. As with yellow, the choice of blue is ordinarily based upon considerations either of lighting or of personal preference. It must always be influenced by the emotional purpose or motive of the room, whatever its practical purpose may be. Blue is by nature suggestive of stillness and inactivity, and it tends to impart these qualities to any decorative treatment in which it appears, in direct proportion to its area and intensity. Thus it will concur, as the dominant hue, in expressing ideas of tranquillity, repose, formality and elegance, but it will not concur in the ideas of animation and gayety.

Orange is most pleasant as the dominant hue when the yellow element in it is markedly in excess of the red. The browns have orange as a base. The red browns, produced from red-orange, are hot, aggressive and unmanageable colors. The golden browns, on the contrary, have something of the cheerfulness and animation of yellow and something of the warmth and hospitality of red, and are therefore excellent for living room, library and hall. They are too dead for the drawing room, and, in general, too lacking in individuality and force for the dining room.

Where violet—and this is also true of red-violet, or purple—is used as the dominant hue, its choice will always be determined by personal preference rather than by any innate fitness for a particular room. Violet

## *The Dominant Hue*

will concur in effects of repose, dignity and elegance, and, in the higher values, of reticence and daintiness. Purple will concur in effects of dignity, sumptuousness and splendor. Its subdued warmth and subtle emotional qualities give it great value and distinction in decorative work, but it must be used only by those who like it.

Green may be made the dominant hue in any room where its quality of restful coolness is desired. Gray-greens and the broken tones of yellow-green are pleasantly suggestive of verdure and of nature in her softer moods. Green is, however, an earthy color, and its calmness has little of the spiritual quality of blue. The greens vary widely in character and emotional value as they pass from somber blue-green to sunny yellow-green, and as they change in value from dark to light. Moreover, they vary surprisingly in pleasantness, not only with purity but also with the texture in which they appear and the light under which they are seen. Some green textiles are hopelessly commonplace and uninteresting. On the other hand, many of the greens to be found in fine velvets and deep-pile rugs possess a distinction and charm not surpassed by any color and approached by few. The normal hue is unpleasant and, far from being restful, has an irritating quality, more potent to exhaust nervous energy than any other hue.

Color must be used to supplement or correct nature in making our rooms warm and sunny or cool and dim. Hence the choice of the dominant hue is often conditioned by the nature and amount of light received by the room to be decorated. If the light is deficient



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In quantity it must be conserved and diffused through the use, not only of high values, but also of hues possessing a high degree of luminosity. If it is deficient in warmth and brightness these qualities must be supplied by warm and bright colors. If it is hot or over-bright these defects must be remedied by cool and relatively non-luminous colors. The luminosity of the spectrum hues was discussed in the chapter on light and shade. It remains here to discuss their relative warmth.

Red is the warmest color and blue the coldest, with orange, yellow and green between them on one side of the chromatic circle and purple and violet on the other side. Rooms with a north light require relatively warm coloring, and rooms with a south light relatively cool; and as a general but by no means an invariable rule one of the warm colors will be made dominant in a north or northeast room, and one of the cool colors in a south or southwest room. It is to be noted, however, that, while very sunny rooms require cool colors, they are most pleasant when light tones of those colors are employed. Light blues and greens temper and cool an over-sunny room; dark, cold tones of those hues would destroy the character of the room, being markedly inconsistent with its light, sunny and somewhat gay nature. On the other hand, north rooms are in general most pleasant with darker tones of the warm hues, for the same reasons of congruity. Of course this does not mean that light, cool colors only are to be used in sunny rooms, or dark, warm colors only in north rooms. It means simply that the dominant hues and tones must vary with the light, subject

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to the general requirement of congruity that the tone of all colors will be progressively lowered with the increasing size of the room. Neutral gray has no place in north rooms. Where there is plenty of north light, a very warm gray—say a light sand—can be used on the walls in conjunction with rugs, hangings, upholstery stuffs and accessories in which red, rose, orange or golden yellows are emphasized; but where there is only a little north light the room must have yellow. As an extreme instance we may take a dining room on the north side of a house shut in by hills and trees. Such a room, if small, could be treated with cream paneled walls and trim, a plain or self-tone rose-red rug, and chintz hangings containing rose-reds, blues and corn-yellows on a cream ground; or, if larger and more imposing, with black lacquered woodwork, soft yellow damask or grass-cloth walls, an orange-gold plain rug, and hangings of brocade in colors ranging from orange-red to the yellow of the walls.

Warm-colored walls are more agreeable to many people than cool, more becoming to many complexions, and more sympathetic backgrounds for other furnishings. For these reasons it is often wise to use cream or warm gray walls in a room where the dominant hue must be cold, rather than to put a light tone of the hue itself on the walls. Thus when yellow of the required tone is almost but not perfectly neutralized by its complementary violet, the resulting gray makes a better wall for a dominant violet or plum than would a violet-gray of the same tone.

Choice of the dominant hue is often conditioned, or

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at least influenced, by the size of the room. Tones of all the hues appear to advance or retreat, according to the amount of white light in them. "The whole room expands or dwindles," observed Professor James, "according as we raise or lower the gas jet." In addition to this very important consideration, the decorator must be governed by the fact, already noted, that the hues differ notably in their power to cause surfaces covered with them to appear to advance or retreat. Owing to the peculiar construction of the eye, the red rays from a given stimulus first affect the eye, followed by the other hues in the order of their warmth. For this reason the warm colors appear to bring in the walls of a room, while the cool colors appear to push them back. This power of hue was flatly denied by Ruskin, but it has been confirmed and explained by science since his day, and it is of course a matter of common observation. Parsons cites the interesting fact that a jury of six men, called upon to estimate the size of identical rooms, one colored throughout in spectral red and the other in light clear blue, judged the latter to be more than thirty per cent larger than the former. Even where mixed and relatively neutral walls are used, a room will vary perceptibly in apparent size with warm or cool color. This fact presents no difficulty to the decorator except in the case of small north rooms, which must be made warmer without being made smaller. Here he may resort to ivory walls and trim and a rose-red or yellow carpet, plain or self-toned, and covering the entire floor, since a rug would make the room look smaller by reason of the disposition of

## *The Dominant Hue*

the eye to see the inner rather than the outer lines of the space; to light yellowish-gray walls with orange, and so on. Any north or coldy-lighted room may be made to appear warmer by the presence of growing plants and flowers, as the mind always associates the idea of warmth with growing things.

Inasmuch as color is used in the house chiefly to give pleasure to its occupants, it is clear that, when other factors permit, personal taste or preference should determine the choice of the dominant hue. It is of course to be remembered that here, as elsewhere in decorative practice, personal fancy may be given a freer flight in the bedroom, boudoir, sewing room or study than in rooms shared in common, where compromises are often necessary.

A favorite color may be used on the walls in a degree of intensity ranging up to the maximum of one-half in cases where one is satisfied with the comparatively weak emotional reactions which relatively neutral color is capable of producing. Where the full emotional effect of a favorite color is desired, the purer color must be spotted in against almost neutral walls. The peculiar qualities of any hue tend to disappear, as we have seen, as the hue loses purity. No one who craves a rich, vibrant red will be satisfied with a reddish gray or a washed-out rose or pink, nor will he accept azure as a substitute for blue, or pale heliotrope in lieu of purple. The strong colors must, however, be kept off the walls. They may be used, if not too pure, on the floor, and even in the hangings and upholstery; but when they are used at all it will ordinarily be best

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to do the walls in some neutral, like cream, tan, putty, light taupe, or greenish-gray. It is a common mistake to assume that the stimulating or satisfying power of a favorite color depends upon the area of the surfaces over which it is distributed. In fact, it rather varies inversely with the area, and depends far more upon the intensity and quality of the color, and the texture in which it appears, than upon extension in space. A single ruby-red porcelain bowl against a cream or gray-green wall will have more power to satisfy a real craving for red than will a room done in crimson rugs, walls, and hangings.

Always in choosing the dominant hue care must be taken to select one that is becoming. Few women have an adequate conception of the degree in which their looks are affected by the colors of their rooms. We have already noted that the effect of ground color upon local color is often extraordinary, and it must always be remembered that the colors of floor, hangings and furniture coverings, and especially of the walls, are certain to affect for good or ill the colors of complexion, hair and costume. A woman who is too dark, for example, ought to do her room in low tones, since the effect of white woodwork and pale walls will inevitably be to make her appear still darker. Similarly, a sallow complexion will appear more yellowish in a lavender room, because the violet will tinge the face with its complementary; while the woman who has too much color will find the red in her cheeks intensified and given a purplish cast in a room done in yellowish-green.

## *The Dominant Hue*

Readers of Locke's novel, "The Glory of Clementina," will recall an amusing instance—freely adapted, no doubt, from the historical incident of Napoleon's sister—of the effective use of color in the dinner scene. Here Clementina Wing, a great artist but a jealous woman, devised a wonderful scheme of table decorations in black and gold, amber and iris, which perfectly set off the beauty of her own complexion and costume, and at the same time sent into total eclipse a dangerous rival whose pale complexion, chestnut hair and lavender gown could not stand contact with the rich, strong colors. Most women are happily under no necessity for waging such merciless warfare, but every one is properly disposed to make the most of such gifts as the gods have vouchsafed. One of the agents always at her command is the wise use of background color. Many a woman who cannot understand why she fails to look her best at her own dinner table will find the answer in the walls behind her back.

The painter produces his color effects with paints, of which one hue costs little more than another. The decorator, on the other hand, produces his color effects with textiles and other materials, of which some are enormously more expensive than others. For this reason the amount of money available for the decoration of a given room is often an important factor in determining, or at least in limiting, the choice of the dominant hue. In the first place, many of the more subtle and beautiful colors can be found only in costly pile fabrics or damasks. In the case of floor coverings, many of these colors are never to be found in stock

## *The Principles of Interior Decoration*

at all, and they can be used by the decorator only when there is both money and time to have rugs specially woven to order. Such colors as jade, reseda and vert antique among the greens, or apricot, copper and rose-red among the reds, are ordinarily confined to specially made and costly rugs and plain carpets. If they are stocked at all it will be only in weaves too expensive for use in ordinary homes.

Moreover, some colors look well in cheap materials, while others do not. For example, calcimine colors, which are very much cheaper than either canvas and oil paint or good wall paper, are pleasing in practically all the variants of yellow; but they are unpleasing in the variants of red and blue, including pink, rose, lavender, heliotrope, azure, and the soft, light blue-greens. Pale tints of blue or red are of questionable value as wall colors in any material, since pink keys up the nerves, while pale blue is associated in the mind with the idea of illimitable spaces, whereas the very nature of a wall is to be fixed and confining. If, however, these colors are insisted upon for wall use, they must be employed in materials richer in appearance than calcimine.

In cheap textiles of all kinds pale tints of red, blue and violet are likely to be difficult to find and totally lacking in distinction, while the colors themselves fade quickly. Exception to this latter statement must be made in favor of the so-called Sundour or Sun-fast drapery stuffs, which are warranted to be fast to light. Few of these fabrics, however, have in the less expensive qualities any marked beauty of texture, and all



PLATE XI.—The side hangings are here so wide as to rob the window treatment of a dominant element. They should be pushed farther back at the top or else caught back at a point either below or above the horizontal center of the window. (Compare Figures 16 and 51.) Note also that the outer lines are crooked and sprawling, so that the hangings do not help to define the structure of the room, but rather tend to render it amorphous.



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## *The Dominant Hue*

have the serious defect of losing such beauty as they may possess when held against the light, which is of course precisely where draperies have to appear during the daytime. It may be noted that when these fabrics are made up without lining they must have ample fullness, so that the folds will help to shut out the glare of light and thus to enrich the texture as seen from the room.

As a general rule, it may be said that in cheap textiles of medium tone the variants of yellow or orange are the richest and most satisfying. Red appears to advantage only in relatively expensive materials, and the same is true in less degree of violet and blue. In most inexpensive fabrics the tints of a hue are more pleasing, though less stable, than its shades.

It is a characteristic of many housewives that they are unwilling to recognize the fact that certain color schemes can be worked out successfully only in costly materials, and that when such materials are too expensive another treatment must be substituted. Many of the very charming color schemes described in books or magazines were carried out in materials unavailable to the one who tries to copy or adapt them to her own home, and the use of cheaper substitutes can result only in disappointment. It is far easier to-day than it was a decade or two ago to give a room beauty of coloring through the use of relatively inexpensive materials, if one is willing to modify the scheme to fit the materials. The wise housewife will accordingly recognize the fatuity of trying to make gilt do the work of gold, and employ her ingenuity and taste in making her home

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attractive with such things as she can afford to pay for.

In conclusion, it is to be remembered that the colors have certain psycho-physical properties, and that in the case of invalids and persons suffering from nervous disorders these properties will influence and often determine the choice of the dominant hue. The red-yellow-orange end of the spectrum is warm and active, while the blue-violet end is cold and passive. People normally feel aggressive and inclined to vigorous action when surrounded by red, and passive, with a tendency toward depression, when surrounded by blue. In the language of the laboratory, the warm colors are dynamogenic in their effect. They tend to develop nervous energies and to intensify those already under way, while those of the blue end tend to reduce or to inhibit such energies.

## CHAPTER XIII

### COLOR HARMONY

**W**E become aware of beauty in a color composition through the easy perception of likenesses among its diverse elements. In this process the mind, following its normal method of thinking from the particular to the general, passes from perception of the variety of color stimuli to apprehension of their essential unity. In the attempt to create beauty in a color treatment, however, this process is reversed. We begin by insuring unity through the choice and distribution of a dominant hue, and then proceed to add the variety of hue and tone necessary to beauty.

In one sense this is an easy, simple, almost a mechanical process. We already know, through study of the chromatic circle, how the various hues are related. We know that the color on either side of the dominant hue is half like and half unlike it, and therefore sure to yield a measure both of unity and diversity if used with it; and that its complementary, lying directly opposite on the circle, is wholly unlike it and therefore certain to add to the effect of diversity. We know that the color values must be arranged in an ascending scale from relatively dark on the floor to relatively light on

## *The Principles of Interior Decoration*

the ceiling; that the walls and ceiling must be relatively neutral, whatever their hue, while somewhat purer color may be used on the floor and in hangings and furniture coverings; that pure or almost pure color can be used only for accent and in very small areas; that in general the purity of a color will vary inversely with its area; and that while contrasts of hue, intensity and tone are required to give diversity and make beauty possible, not more than two of these factors ought to appear in any given contrast, while one is sufficient for many of them. Equipped with this knowledge, we can start with any hue approved by our judgment as a fitting dominant hue and build up a color scheme free from serious dissonances, revealing unity in diversity, and therefore, in some measure, beauty.

In fact, we can, even with our present knowledge, go further than this; for we understand the emotional values of the various hues, of pure and neutral colors, of light and dark tones, and can accordingly proceed at once to the expression of ideas, which is the only thing that gives interior decoration dignity and standing among the other creative arts. Finally, we recognize the importance of expressing these ideas through convergent effects, in which line, form, texture, proportion, balance and light supplement and confirm hue, intensity and tone, and we know a little of the technique through which these convergences are produced.

This much, and a little more, it is easy to teach and to learn. Beyond this little more the use of color cannot be taught. Instruction can lay down a few broad principles, or guides to practice, and through study of

## *Color Harmony*

these principles the beginner in the art can learn to avoid serious mistakes and to work out pleasing though simple harmonies for any dominant hue, just as the beginner in music, through study of the principles of counterpoint and musical progression, can learn to avoid dissonances and to work out pleasing though simple harmonies for any melody. But the subtle or invigorating harmonies that soothe or stir the soul demand for their creation in either art an imaginative power and a mastery of technique not to be acquired by reading a book, or a multitude of books. The brief and tentative discussion of color harmony here included is offered as a guide to further study, and particularly to experiment and practice. We must use color in our rooms. Hence we must create color arrangements, whether pleasant or unpleasant. Accordingly any exposition of the subject, however limited in value, seems justified if it can help toward pleasing arrangements, however simple.

When the decorator, as a result of his study of all the considerations of fitness involved, decides upon the dominant hue for a given room and sets about the production of a color harmony, his problem is four-fold. He must (a) select hues which are pleasing together; (b) distribute these hues, both as to area and position, so that the total effect is pleasing; (c) distribute all the colors, whatever their hue, with reference to their luminosity or value, in such a way that the tonality, or total effect of light and shade in the room, is pleasing; and (d) distribute the hues with reference to their purity or intensity in such a way

## *The Principles of Interior Decoration*

that a balance is struck, pleasing in itself and consistent with the motive of the room, between the forcefulness and obvious quality of pure color and the passivity and subtlety of neutral color.

We find that hues which are pleasing together may be selected through variations of any one of three general methods, which result in three general classes or types of color harmonies, known as (a) harmonies of analogy; (b) harmonies of complementaries, or contrast; and (c) triads or trichromatic harmonies. These methods will perhaps appear most clear if they are described and exemplified in terms of the same dominant hue. Any hue on the warm side of the chromatic circle would do for this purpose, but we will take yellow-orange, because of its peculiar fitness for use under widely varying conditions. It is, in the first place, a color which can be used effectively in all three types of harmonies. It can in practice be used effectively in either cheap or costly schemes of furnishing. It is agreeable and becoming to most people, and it can be used fittingly in the hall, living room, drawing room, dining room, breakfast room, and even in the bedroom. The hue varies, according to the amounts of black and white in it, from dark golden brown to old ivory. It is intimately related to yellow on one side and to orange on the other, and more remotely related to green and to red. It is in strong contrast to blue and to violet, and complementary to blue-violet.

It is clear that the easiest way to give variety in color to a room done in yellow-orange is to keep the hue constant and vary the tones in a close harmony, as in

## *Color Harmony*

the use of a rich golden brown carpet and hangings, light golden brown walls, tan ceiling, nut-brown woodwork and furniture, and écru curtains. Such a room will possess the virtues of unity and repose, but it will also reveal the fatal vice of monotony. Even if its monotony be relieved by small color accents in pictures, pottery, lamps, books and cushions, the room will still be likely to have three serious faults. First, its background surfaces, being all alike except for variations in tone, constantly employ the same color nerves, giving them no opportunity for the intervals of rest that we have seen to be essential to clear and pleasurable color perception. Secondly, the contrasts between adjacent surfaces will cause the lower and richer tones of the carpet to take the life out of the wall color. Finally, there is in fact too little diversity in the treatment to be pleasant to normal people throughout a long period of time.

The next step in increasing the diversity and interest of the color treatment is to add the extreme red and yellow hues of orange, and to bring in sharper accents of color, as in the substitution of old gold, burnt orange or henna for some of the brown areas in hangings, lamp shades, cushions, or upholstery fabrics.

The third step is to include both red and yellow, colors which lie on either side of the dominant hue and share in its composition. Thus we could do a library in walnut or fumed oak woodwork and furniture, golden-yellow grasscloth walls, old ivory ceiling, orange-red Khiva or chenille rug, brocade hangings of old gold and orange red, porcelain lamps in old



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Chinese yellow, with maize silk shades, and sunny or ruddy-hued pictures framed in antique gold ; or a dining

room in paneled walls of Italian walnut, modeled plaster ceiling in antique ivory, carved walnut furniture, henna or Venetian red carpet, dull orange taffeta undercurtains, and hangings and furniture coverings of old red and gold damask.

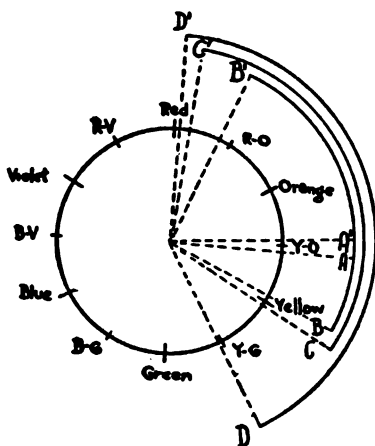


FIGURE 44.—Starting from a single hue the arc of the chromatic circle included in harmonies of analogy can be progressively widened until almost all of a half-circle is included. A-A', narrowest interval, employing one hue only; B-B', arc widened to extreme variants of orange; C-C', arc widened to include both red and yellow; D-D', arc widened to include both red and green—provided, however, that both are keyed to yellow, as Venetian red and olive green.

If, however, we do not like red, or consider that its use would make our room too warm, it is equally easy to turn in the other direction on the chromatic circle to yellow-green, which is related to yellow-orange by the common strain of yellow. Thus olive, a tawny, yellowish-brownish green,

may be substituted for the golden brown of the carpet in the room first described, as olive edged with old gold, olive and gold, or old gold edged with olive, may be

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substituted for the hangings. This would give us a room in which the principal areas were as far apart as yellow-orange and yellow-green, while the gamut of related colors may be further extended in either direction in the accents and small masses. A little blue-green, for example, combined with olive and mode, could be used in tapestry furniture coverings, while old red could be introduced in pictures, potteries, or book bindings.

These harmonies differ in diversity and animation, but all are alike in that they are related by ties of common blood. Similar analogous harmonies may in theory be built upon tones of any hue or gamut of related hues, but in practice they are restricted to gamuts in which the warm hues play a large if not a preponderant part. Thus we may have analogous harmonies built up of hues lying between red and blue-green on the warm side of the circle. Between red and blue-green on the other side of the circle the colors are too cold to be agreeable in harmonies of analogy; so far, at least, as the larger areas of interior decoration are concerned.

Harmonies of this character are the easiest to produce, since their creation does not necessitate the possession of a *flair* for color or a highly cultivated taste, but only common sense and freedom from color blindness. Harmonies of analogy are also quiet, restful and subtle. Through the absence of that sense of activity which results from strong color contrasts, these harmonies not only make a room more reposeful but more spacious, and are therefore in general to be chosen

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for rooms which seem small or overcrowded with furniture, as well as for those wherein repose is the first consideration. Moreover, since the colors employed are markedly alike in emotional effect, harmonies of analogy must always be employed in rooms which are to be invested in the maximum degree with a particular emotional quality—that is, in rooms in which what is known in the studios as the temperamental idea is to be expressed. The highest beauty of analogous harmonies depends upon perfect keying, or infusion of the dominant hue into all the subordinate hues in such a way as to give an effect of atmospheric coloring, as if the room were seen through a delicately tinted glass. It is, of course, clear that the atmospheric effects characteristic of perfect coloring are difficult for the beginner to manage. They can in fact be produced only when broken and grayish tones of the hues employed are used skillfully. Thus in the room last described the old red and the olive appear much as vermilion and emerald would appear if seen through a haze of grayish yellow, and even the blue-green of the tapestry must be sufficiently broken with gray to make it look like a dull blue seen through this same gray-yellow haze.

All harmonies of this class, as described above, reveal a characteristic lack of snap, and none would be accepted by the mind as wholly satisfying. This defect is due to the total absence of the complementary of the dominant hue, which ought to be made to appear in some form, however unimportant, in every color scheme. Physiologically the color nerves require to

## *Color Harmony*

be refreshed, while psychologically the mind requires to be relieved and stimulated by a note of strongly-contrasting color, as by an occasional high or explosive note in an even melody, or a patch of shadow on a sunlit field of grain. Thus in the dining room described above, wherein warm browns, old ivory, orange, old gold and Venetian reds were used together, the decorator would also introduce a note of blue in Venetian glass or majolica, and would probably echo this note in the border of the rug, in some detail of the cornice boards that support the hangings, and in some part of the design of the parchment masks or shades of the lighting fixtures.

The amount of the complementary introduced into a room may vary anywhere from slight accents up to a third or even more of all the colored surfaces of the room. When there is only a little of it the harmony remains one of analogy, set off by touches of its complementary; when there is a lot of it the harmony becomes one of complementaries, or contrast. In harmonies of this kind, two important colors only are employed, although small accents of other hues will of course be introduced into the room. Complementary harmonies are relatively easy to produce, and may be varied easily and safely from simplicity to relative complexity to accord with personal feeling and the decorative or emotional requirements of the room. They are less subtle and less restful than harmonies of analogy, but more animated and more brilliant. Moreover, since a pair of complementary colors are necessarily unlike emotionally—if one is warm and exhil-

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arating the other is cool and tranquillizing—harmonies of this type are incapable of expressing the temperamental idea.

The real difficulty in the creation of these harmonies is to fix upon the complementary of the dominant hue. In the chapter on color it was pointed out that there is

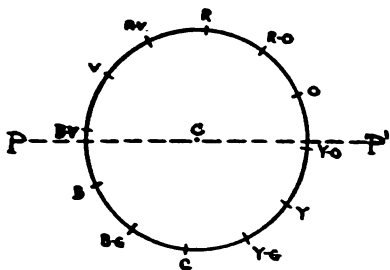


FIGURE 45.—The straight line P-P', rotating on C as a pivot, indicates the pairs of pigmental complementaries.

a difference between the scientific facts of color and the working explanation of color phenomena formulated by Chevreul and generally adopted by artists and color workers, and, for the sake of simplicity and helpfulness in practice, adopted also in this

study. At this point, however, even at the risk of some confusion in thought, it seems desirable to introduce the color chart, published in Von Bezold's *Theory of Color*, in which the true scientific complementaries are indicated by straight lines drawn from any point on its circumference through the center of the circle. The opposing pairs of colors thus obtained are true complementaries because each pair, when mixed as colored lights, yields white light. Nevertheless, color workers have found that in practice true complementaries for the most part make disagreeable contrasts, and that these contrasts are far more agreeable estheti-

## Color Harmony

cally when the opposing colors are placed a little nearer together on the warm side of the scale. Thus vermilion red is more pleasant with green than with cyan, or blue-green; orange is more agreeable with ultra-marine than with turquoise or greenish-blue; and yellow is more pleasant with violet than with blue. For this reason we are warranted in accepting as complementaries the pairs opposed to each other in Figure 45.

It appears from the study of Von Bezold's chart, however, that between violet, purple and red there are differences far greater than those between their scientific complementaries — a circum-

stance that makes the use of green in complementary harmonies very difficult. Neither painters nor decorators have used this harmony to any great extent, probably because of this difficulty, and it is a safe rule of practice to confine the use of green to harmonies of analogy or to the triads. Contrasting harmonies of yellow-green and purple, yellow and violet, yellow-orange and violet-blue, and orange and blue are much easier to manage.

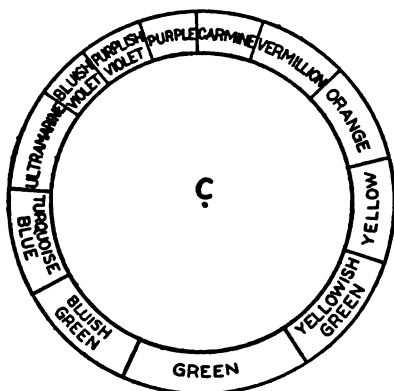


FIGURE 46.—A free adaptation of Von Bezold's chart. Colors lying on opposite sides of the center are accurately complementary.

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The triads or trichromatic harmonies are based upon arrangements of any three hues that are equidistant and therefore lie at the points of an equilateral triangle inscribed within the chromatic circle; as, for example, red, blue and yellow. If one member of a triad is changed in hue to right or left each of the other two members will normally be changed equally in the same

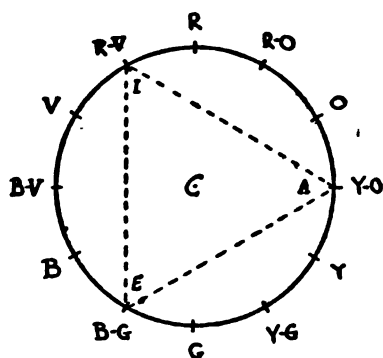


FIGURE 47.—The triangle A-E-I, rotating on C as a center, indicates typical triads or trichromatic harmonies.

direction. Thus we may have triads in red, blue and yellow; red-orange, yellow-green and blue-violet; orange, green and violet; or yellow-orange, blue-green and red-violet. In addition to these triads others may be devised by skilled colorists by slightly altering one or two of the hues, as in the case of purple-red, yellow and cyan-blue, or vermillion, dark greenish-yellow (olive) and violet-blue—a triad much used in several of the Italian schools of painting. White or gray can be used effectively with most of the triads, and particularly with orange, green and violet, and purple-red, yellow and cyan-blue; while in all of the triads small-interval changes of hue and the introduction of small accents of additional hues are permissible.

Triads are difficult to use effectively in decoration.

## *Color Harmony*

The delicate balance of colors in area, tone and intensity, perplexing enough when only two important hues are employed, becomes very much more perplexing in the case of three important hues. Certain color theorists of the last century worked out formulas designed to guide the decorator in the quantitative distribution of color areas; but these formulas are so clumsy and inadequate, and so subject in practice to a thousand modifications and derogations, that it is far safer to ignore them altogether. Indeed, it is far safer for the beginner to let the triads alone until through study and experience he has acquired the sure feeling for color which makes all rules for dealing with it merely a hindrance.

Besides their theoretical complexity, triad schemes are in practice hard to execute by reason of the difficulty of finding decorative materials in which the colors are properly distributed. In fact this is often impossible unless the time and money available permit having things specially designed and made to order. In the case of our chosen dominant hue, for example, a triad scheme would employ yellow-orange, blue-green and red-violet. Since two of these hues are cold, the triad would probably be disagreeable in low tones. Therefore, in doing a room—say a sitting room or boudoir—the decorator, in order to make the cold colors light enough to be agreeable, would break all the colors with light gray, which would give him a light grayish tan, sage green, and lavender. Executed in the best things to be found ready-made in the shops, these



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colors would be likely to result in a somewhat stiff and unsympathetic arrangement of grayish tan walls, sage green plain carpet, lavender on some of the furniture, repeated in pictures, ceramics, cushions, or lamps, and a mixture of lavender, green and grayish tan in printed linen hangings and slip covers for some of the furniture. To achieve anything like a subtle harmony he would have to wait several months and pay roundly for a special rug containing the three colors properly distributed, while fringes and gimps would have to be specially made, lamp bases and picture frames specially toned, and a screen or a decorative panel for the over-mantle specially painted.

Red, blue and yellow do not present the same difficulties, because of the great range of rugs and drapery stuffs containing those hues in the lower values, as well as the range of fabrics containing rose, cream and azure in the high values. Even here, however, the difficulties are considerable. Both analogous and complementary harmonies may under suitable conditions be widened by accents to include a wide gamut of colors, and therefore to meet practically every color requirement.

Having chosen the hues to be used in a given room, the decorator must determine the areas upon which each hue is to appear. It is clear that no formulas of constant value can be adduced to cover these distributions, since the effect of a color will depend far more upon its purity than upon the superficial area it covers. Indeed, there is but one rule which can never be disregarded, namely, that the mind must not be left in any



*Courtesy of Gill & Reigate Ltd., London.*

**PLATE XII.**—Small occasional tables are not only necessary in grouping furniture for convenient use, but they also serve to relieve a room of the effect of heaviness due to exclusive use of large pieces, and to give it a note of gaiety and animation. The table shown above is an example of fine proportion and of perfect adjustment of ornament to structure.



## *Color Harmony*

perplexity as to the dominant hue. For example, in a room with light golden brown walls, tan ceiling, brown furniture, and olive rug, hangings and furniture coverings, there is a chance for perplexity as to which color is dominant, and such perplexity would mean a lack of unity and therefore of beauty in the room. Here the decorator will first of all see to it that the yellow element in both hues is clearly apparent. If this seems insufficient, olive and brown furniture coverings, or olive and gold hangings, or both, may be substituted for the plain olive. In other words, by some method or other the dominant hue must be made clearly apparent to the mind.

In triad schemes the two secondary hues may be distributed pretty much according to personal fancy. These two colors should, however, be so distributed that the total effect of one, as determined both by area and intensity, is perceptibly greater than that of the other.

In complementary harmonies the general rule of practice is to increase the relative area of the dominant hue as the purity of the wall color is increased. In a yellow and violet room, for example, when the walls are of an almost neutral yellowish-gray the quantities of yellow and violet used in the other surfaces of the room would be as nearly as practicable equal; assuming, for the purposes of this illustration, that these colors were employed in equal intensity. With yellow walls of one-fourth intensity the other areas would contain about twice as much yellow as violet, and with yellow walls of one-half intensity about three times as much yellow as violet. With yellow and violet of

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unequal intensity the relative areas would be altered to allow for the differences. The method, of course, applies, roughly, to all pairs of complementaries. It is illustrated graphically in Figure 48, in which the upper section of each oblong represents the wall area and the lower sections all the other colored areas.

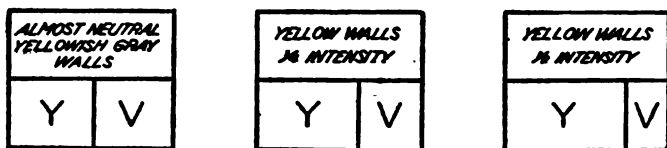


FIGURE 48.—In complementary schemes the area of the dominant hue, other things being equal, is increased directly with the purity of the wall color.

The distribution of colors as to their luminosity, apart from the nature of the hues, is of the greatest importance in color practice, being, indeed, fundamental to all good work. The subject has however been discussed at such length as is permitted by the limitations of this study in the chapters on contrast and light and shade. It is reintroduced here merely in order to fix it in its proper position in the general subject of color harmony.

In intensity colors may vary from spectral purity to neutral gray. Spectrum colors are, as we have repeatedly noted, bold, aggressive, obvious and of pronounced individuality. In direct proportion to the degree in which their own positive qualities are overcome, or neutralized, by the equally positive antithetical qualities of their complementaries they become progressively quiet, subtle and refined. It is manifest

## *Color Harmony*

that all background surfaces must be relatively neutral, both because the eye could not stand constant exposure to large areas of positive color, and because it is the proper function of a background to stay back—to provide an effective foil for the clearer outlines and brighter colors of the objects or the persons who appear against it. A delicate picture or complexion against a pure red or green or yellow background would be like a lullaby sung to the accompaniment of a caliope.

The wall color may be anything from half-intensity to a gray just tinged with the hue. Other things being equal, purity of the wall color will vary inversely with the number and purity of the other hues in the room. No washed-out, characterless, colorless room is pleasant to live in. Every room requires a certain amount of color interest and of positive color quality, although the amount will vary according to the purpose and size of the room and the tastes of its occupants. When there are few hues in the rugs, hangings, furniture and decorative objects employed in a given room, and these few hues relatively neutral in character, the walls ought normally to approach the maximum of one-half intensity in order to invest the room, as a unit, with the necessary color interest. For example, yellow used on the walls of a Craftsman living room furnished in dull colors and having only a few low-toned pictures, vases and books for accents could be anywhere from one-fourth to one-half intensity; whereas in a drawing room furnished with a Kermanshah rug, bright-colored paintings, rich porcelains, lacquered cabinets, and satin-

## *The Principles of Interior Decoration*

wood chairs and settees upholstered in brocades or damasks the hue would be neutralized to a point where it would just appear in the warm grayish-cream walls.

When the purity of the dominant hue is constant, the number and purity of the subordinate hues will be increased directly with the area of the dominant hue. A room done in blue and tan, with tan walls, écru curtains, blue and fawn rug, blue and tan hangings and blue furniture coverings would need few accents of other colors, and those of low intensity. But if hangings and furniture coverings of tan and fawn were also used, so that all the background surfaces were in broken tones of orange, strong accents, not only of the complementary blue but also of old red, green and yellow, would be required in order to give sufficient color character to the room.

Up to this point we have discussed complementary harmonies as if both colors could be used pleasantly on plain surfaces, and the whole problem of their harmonious distribution were one of area, purity and tone. As a matter of good practice, however, large plain surfaces can rarely be placed together happily, and large plain complementary surfaces almost never. It is not only that the eye demands a judicious balance of plain and ornamented surfaces, but also, and chiefly, that complementary colors on plain juxtaposed surfaces are intolerably abrupt. Cultivated people do not like abruptness in any of the relations of life. Suave curves and blended colors please in the same way that suave manners and carefully modulated voices please, and for the same reason. Obviously complementary

## *Color Harmony*

colors can be blended only when both are very near the point of complete neutralization; but under proper conditions complementaries of one-half and three-fourths intensity can be so united that they seem to belong together, and so that they can be seen with a sense of pleasing stimulation but with no sense of shock. The principle, which was mentioned in the chapter on contrast as rhythmic contrast, is called, according to the method of its application, interchange or counterchange.

Contrast, as a principle of composition, emphasizes unlikenesses. Interchange, on the other hand, establishes the likeness or harmony of unlike elements by giving to each a part of the other. Interchanged colors were very commonly employed in heraldry. For example, if a shield, divided longitudinally, were half red and half white, a bar or heraldic figure placed at the middle of the shield would be colored red on the white side and white on the red side. The principle is employed continually in all periods of good design. It is one of the most important, and perhaps quite the most consistently ignored, in the whole field of interior decoration.

A room with plain yellow-orange (tan) walls of one-fourth intensity and a plain blue rug of one-half intensity would be unpleasant. It would be improved slightly by the use of plain blue hangings to harmonize with the rug and plain tan, mode or beaver furniture coverings to harmonize with the walls, since the interchange, though crudely managed, would soften the contrast. The improvement would be much more

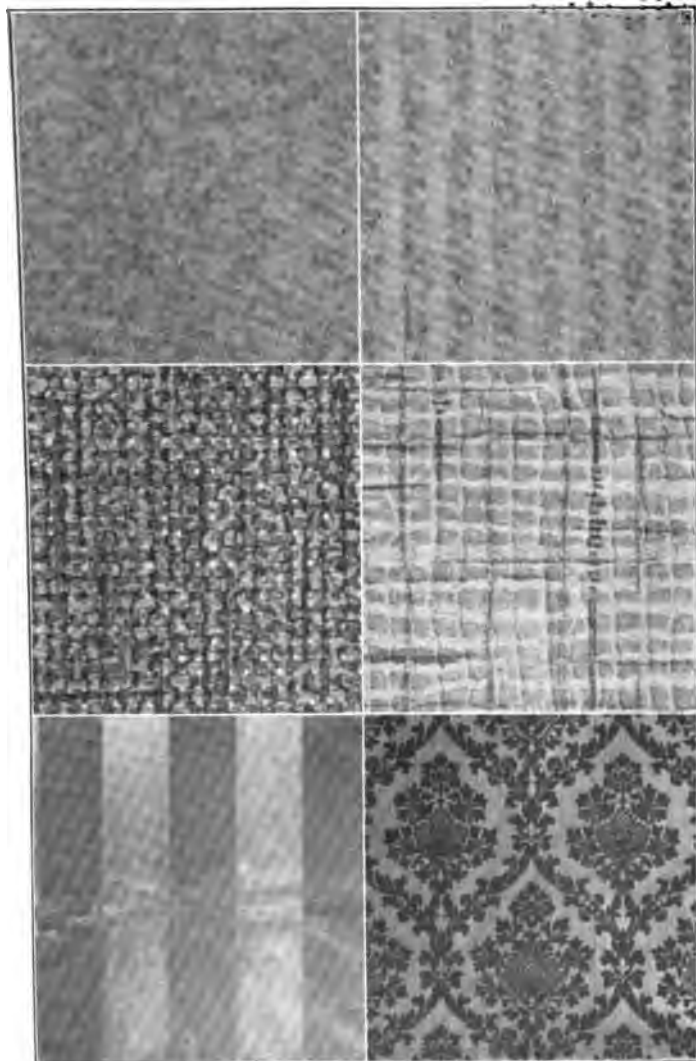


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marked if a blue and tan damask, or a linen or cretonne having these colors clearly emphasized in its design, were substituted for the hangings, and used, in conjunction with a plain or self-tone mode or beaver on some of the furniture; and it would be still more marked if the plain rug were displaced by one in which beaver or walnut appeared in the design of border or field, or both.

Applications and variations of the method of interchange are innumerable. No attempt to exemplify them further need be made here, since the principle is so simple that any one can apply it. The aims to be kept in mind are two: first, to soften the relationship of contiguous colors which would otherwise be harsh; and secondly to effect an artistic and carefully balanced division of the two principal colors. Thus the room just discussed, having walls of one-fourth intensity, will be most pleasing if the other colored surfaces reveal approximately twice as much of the dominant hue as of its complementary. If, therefore, a considerable quantity of blue is used in furniture coverings, cushions, table runner, pottery and so forth, the amount available for rugs and hangings will be correspondingly reduced.

The trim or woodwork of a room outlines its structure and helps to steady and support its decorative treatment, as was set forth in the chapter on proportion. So far as the effect of color is concerned, the strength and importance of the woodwork depends in part upon darkness of tone and purity of hue, but chiefly upon the contrast between the colors of trim and wall. This contrast may be in hue or tone or intensity,



*Courtesy of Arthur Sanderson & Sons, Ltd., London.*

PLATE XIII.—Wall papers showing interesting background textures, of varying decorative weight, or strength. The figured paper is a wool flock, suitable for use in a large and richly-appointed room as a background for large oil pictures.

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amgoulo

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or in any two or all three of these constants. Thus it may range from a trim painted to match the walls, and therefore offering no contrast whatever except in texture, up—for example—to dark oak or walnut woodwork with light clear blue walls, which would afford a striking contrast in hue, intensity and tone. It is unnecessary to state that the latter contrast would be exceedingly bad. A contrast of two constants is all that can be permitted, and in many rooms a contrast of one constant is sufficient for structural emphasis. Thus a bedroom with pale cream walls and trim to match would reveal a maximum effect of spaciousness and a minimum of snap and strength; while it would lose in spaciousness and gain in structural emphasis with a trim of white, deep cream, *café au lait* or pale apple-green.

In most houses the trim is a fixed architectural factor, which cannot be changed to suit the preferences of the decorator. Where this is the case the color harmony must be adjusted to take account of the trim. This adjustment will ordinarily involve no modification of the hues to be employed; but it usually involves some modification of the factors of luminosity and intensity in the wall colors. Where an unwelcome hue must appear in the woodwork its appearance should be minimized as far as possible by doing away with all contrast in intensity and reducing the contrast in tone to the minimum. In cases where the woodwork occupies a relatively large area, as in a dining room with walls paneled to within a few feet of the cornice, it will usually determine, or at least limit, the choice of hues. Black walls, for example, or walls of

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very dark brown, necessitate the use of two or more warm colors, while white paneling ordinarily requires the use of at least one warm and one cool color.

Connecting rooms must always be united by harmonious coloring, and by definite bonds of common color. The degree of likeness in color will depend in part upon personal taste, in part upon the similarity or dissimilarity in purpose and motive among the rooms, and chiefly upon their size. Where either or both—or, in the case of more than two—all of the connecting rooms are small, very little difference in coloring is permissible in floor or walls, because likeness gives an effect of unity and spaciousness, while unlikeness makes for abruptness and tends to diminish the apparent size of the rooms. Where the rooms are of good size, and there is reason to emphasize rather than to minimize the individuality of each, it is usually enough to repeat the dominant hue of the most important room in some form, either obvious or subtle, in each of the connecting rooms. Thus a suite of very small apartments—say a living room, hall and dining room—could be done throughout with warm gray walls and a dull reseda all-over carpet. This would yield the maximum effect of unity and spaciousness, while the variety essential to beauty could be added in hangings, furniture coverings, pictures, flowers, and similar small accents. With rooms a little larger varying tones of the dominant hue could be used on the walls, with considerable variation in pattern. With large rooms different rugs, walls and hangings could be used throughout; provided only that the rooms were

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tied together by a clearly apparent bond of common color. Plain rugs of markedly different hues are unpleasing in adjoining rooms, however large, unless each is relatively neutral, and even then the effect is more convincing if the rugs have simple border designs in interchanged colors. Abruptness must be permitted to appear in a color scheme only as a deliberate device for adding interest, and it is permissible only when so limited in area or in intensity that it cannot disturb the whole treatment. Violently contrasting colors, as we have seen, are intolerable except when used in very small areas. When bright, aggressively colored linens or chintzes are used they must be limited in quantity and displayed against neutral backgrounds.

The layman is disposed to think of color harmony as almost wholly a matter of hue. It is in fact largely a matter of tone. Skill as a colorist in interior decoration is as unfailingly revealed by the ability to use grayish tones skillfully on the larger areas as it is by the ability to create the accents of brighter and purer color that give vitality and color charm. Too exclusive use of grayish tones will inevitably rob a room of everything but quietness, but a free use of relatively neutral color is absolutely essential to beauty and comfort. Gray is a peacemaker among colors, and a potent source of spaciousness and repose. The charm of great houses is largely due to their effect of broad spaces; and while we cannot have broad spaces in small houses, we can at least make the most of what space we do have by the wise use of atmospheric coloring.

## CHAPTER XIV

### ORNAMENT

**O**RNAMENT is that which adorns and embellishes. It gives variety and richness to the ornamented surfaces, and is, no less than plainness, essential to beauty in the decoration of houses. Without ornament a room would inevitably be monotonous and uninteresting. It must, however, be good ornament, and there must not be too much of it.

Ornament exists to enrich and beautify constructional forms, and it is good ornament only when it appears to be not a fortuitous and unrelated addition to those forms, but an integral, organic part of them, as much a matter of growth as the markings of a butterfly or the plumage of a bird. In an accurate sense ornament can have no independent existence. It is always a decoration or embellishment, and it is significant only in association with some useful or constructional form that it is fitted to adorn. The ornament employed in the design of the chair shown in Figure 10 is good ornament because it embellishes and emphasizes artistically the constructional lines of the back and legs. When on the contrary ornament, instead of be-

## *Ornament*

ing content to adorn, seeks to substitute itself for structural forms, as in the Barocco chair shown in



**FIGURE 49.**—Ornament substituted for or exalted at the expense of structure makes beauty impossible.

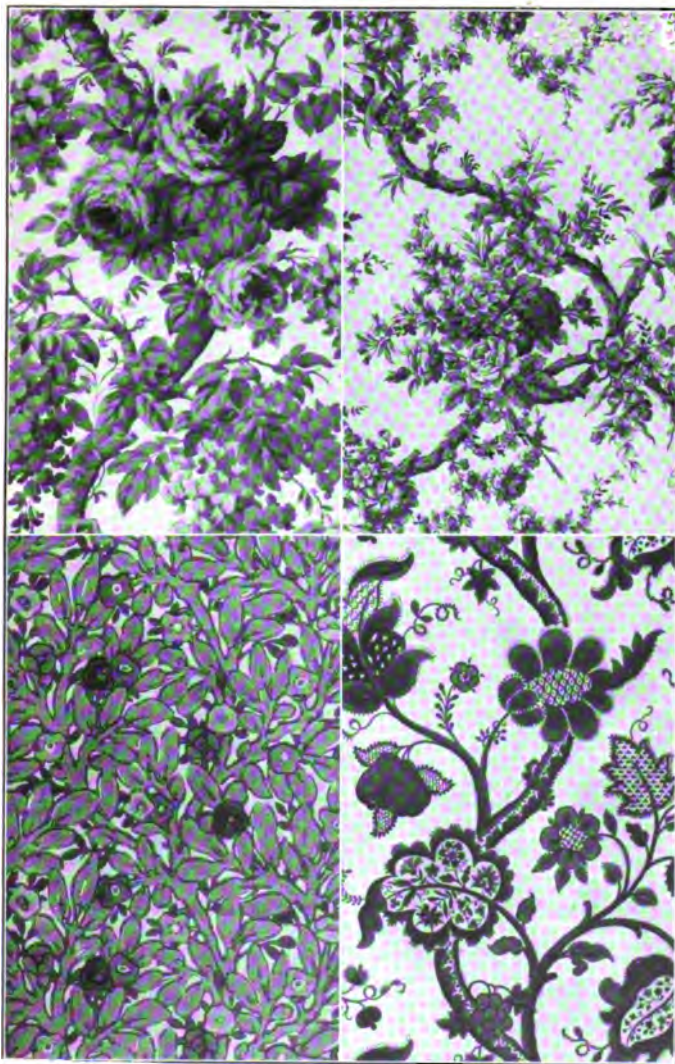
Figure 49, it becomes bad ornament and infinitely worse than none at all.



## *The Principles of Interior Decoration*

All ornament, whatever its character, can be traced to an origin in either natural or geometrical forms. The earliest ornament was almost wholly geometrical, and consisted chiefly in simple arrangements of straight, curved and zigzag lines, or rhythmically repeated circles, scrolls, squares and triangles. With advancing culture and increasing technical skill primitive man learned to look to nature for his ornament. Animal and plant forms were drawn from the natural world, and more and more employed in the embellishment of arms, vessels and wall surfaces.

Natural forms employed as the basis of ornamental design may be used by the designer in either of two ways. When such a form is accurately copied, so that both its details and its peculiar order of growth or development are imitated, the ornament is said to be naturalistic. When the ornament simply reproduces the typical form of the natural object, changing its details and coloring and disregarding its natural order of growth, it is said to be conventional. The wall papers pictured in Plate XIV show ornament drawn from nature, in varying degrees of conventionalization. The Greek honeysuckle or anthemion is purely conventional ornament. In the great ornamental styles the details have for the most part been taken from nature, but treated conventionally. There may be a fairly close imitation of natural forms in the parts of an ornamental design, but never of the natural order of growth; for it is in the nature of good ornament to fit the structural form of the object it adorns, and this



*Courtesy of Arthur Sanderson & Sons, Ltd., London.*

**PLATE XIV.**—Wall papers illustrating varying degrees of conventionalization in ornament.

76. 1911  
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## Ornament

is possible only when the natural order of growth is disregarded.

However, the person of uncultivated taste has a marked predilection for the mere imitation of natural forms, and in all periods of poor taste naturalistic ornament is very common. Forty years ago, in what might be called the iron stag age of American home-making, we were graining wood and wall paper to imitate marble, hanging hair wreaths and wax flowers, glass-encased, on our walls, and weaving the images of cats and dogs, to say nothing of roses and hollyhocks, into our rugs. In England and Germany things were as bad or worse; and even in France naturalistic roses were woven into the Aubusson and Savonnerie carpets of the old régime, while it remained for a Frenchman of a later date to design a *porte-cure-dents*, or toothpick holder, carved or cast in the form of a turkey gobbler, with the toothpicks tastefully disposed fan-wise to form the tail. To-day naturalistic ornament is largely confined to floor coverings, wall papers, drapery stuffs and hand-painted china, and while a lot of it is to be seen in the shops, and more of it in the homes of unsophisticated folk, no one is compelled to buy it; for so notable has been the progress of American manufacturers during the past ten or fifteen years that it is possible to find properly conventionalized ornament in any field, and at any price.

The fondness for naturalistic ornament is no doubt due primarily to the instinct of imitation, which inclines us to like what we have seen before and can

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recognize without difficulty. That this fondness is so persistent is due to our failure to distinguish between the functions of pictorial and decorative art. It is the proper function of a picture to set forth an appearance of nature, whereas it is the sole function of ornament to adorn useful forms, and to make them as agreeable as possible to the eye. To do this ornament must, as we have seen, become an integral part of these forms, adapted to their structural peculiarities, and without any independent character of its own. Thus the rose in a carpet, wall paper or drapery stuff is not in any proper sense a picture of a natural rose. It is simply a means of adorning or embellishing a textile surface, and as such it shares in the nature of the textile and becomes a part of it. In the degree that the rose is designed to copy nature accurately, and to reveal a separate existence apart from the textile, it ceases to be good ornament and becomes a poor picture, and is just as objectionable as any other poor picture would be if it were repeated every few inches.

Ornamental forms are used not only for their purely esthetic value as an ornament or enrichment of structural forms, but also, in many schools of ornament, as symbols, or signs employed to represent and suggest an idea. Thus the trefoil was used in Gothic art not only to embellish structure, but also as the symbol of the Trinity, as the lotus was used in ancient Egypt and throughout the East as the symbol of fecundity and ever-renewing life. Historic ornament is sometimes symbolic, like that of Egypt; sometimes esthetic, like that of Greece; sometimes both esthetic and sym-

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bolic, like that of Persia. Primitive art is largely symbolic, while as man advances in intelligence and culture he has less need for a symbolism as such, and is more and more concerned with the esthetic value of all ornamental forms. Thus even when through the influence of religious ideas ornament retains a markedly symbolic character it is more and more expressed in modes based upon symmetry of form and harmony of color, and thus designed to appeal to the sense of the beautiful as well as to the understanding.

Present-day secular ornament is purely esthetic. It employs symbolic forms without reference to their meaning, and only in so far as they are intrinsically pleasing. Yet the pleasure of the decorator in his work, and the pleasure of each of us in his home, is greatly enhanced by a knowledge of symbolic ornament. It is a thread that unites us with the life of the past, a light that reveals a little of the immense and shadowy reaches of human thought and aspiration. Any one can see the beauty of ornament in the swastika or gammadion fret as used to embellish the apron of an eighteenth-century English table. The initiate alone sees twenty-five centuries beyond England to Greece, and twenty-five—fifty—perhaps a hundred centuries beyond Greece to the immemorial East; for the swastika recreates in his imagination that dim time when man tried with a few crude marks to express the daily wonder of the sun's forward course across the heavens, as the lotus and the tree forms of Oriental rugs reveal to him primitive man's awed consciousness of the mys-

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terious generative forces of nature, and half lift the veil from ancient and all-but-forgotten faiths.

Ornamental art was old—probably thousands of years old—at the time of the cave-man. Its historical development can be traced backward in existing monuments to the middle kingdom of Egypt, while there is sound reason to believe that some of the ornamental forms found in modern rugs from Turkestan have persisted unchanged for more than six thousand years. While ornamental forms and symbols have for thousands of years been spread from one land to another, through commercial intercourse and by the tides of immigration and conquest, so that the whole subject of the rise and evolution of ornament is enormously complex, we can say that in the development of European civilization there have been nine great characteristic ornamental styles: in the ancient world, the Egyptian, the Greek and the Roman; in the medieval world, the Byzantine, the Saracenic and the Gothic; and in the modern world, the Renaissance, the Cinquecento and the Louis Quatorze. Several of these styles have had two or more strongly marked modes—as Doric and Alexandrine Greek, or Romanesque, Lombard and Norman Byzantine—while the sub-variants in different countries and among different peoples have been almost innumerable.

The student will, of course, note that historic ornament and historic decoration are by no means the same thing. Many of the so-called period styles in decoration and furniture have been developed since the rise of the last great ornamental style, and have drawn

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their ornamental detail from whatever historic sources suited the designers. Thus the ornament of the Louis Seize and Empire styles in France, the Adam style in England, and the Biedermaier style in Germany is adapted from classical antiquity.

Successful practice in interior decoration does not require an encyclopedic knowledge of historic ornament, but it does require a very considerable and a very accurate knowledge of that subject. This knowledge the student of interior decoration who aims at anything approaching a mastery of his subject must acquire, even though its acquisition involve some drudgery. Moreover, a little knowledge of the evolution of ornamental art ought to be a part of the equipment of every cultivated person; for every ornamental form is a human document, and ornamental art is as much a revelation of the life and culture of a race or an epoch as is architecture or literature.

There is a wide literature of ornament, and the student will be helped both by such works as the analytical studies of Crane, Day, Wornum and Hamlin, and by the numerous manuals or cyclopedias of ornament, which contain innumerable examples of historic ornament. Of these manuals Meyer's Handbook of Ornament, Glazier's Manual of Historic Ornament and Speltz's Styles of Ornament are in black and white and easily accessible. The two great manuals in color are Owen Jones' Grammar of Ornament and Racinet's *L'ornement polychrome*.

The three cardinal sins against good decoration in the choice and distribution of ornament are revealed



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by the use of ornament not properly related to and dependent upon structure, the use in the same composition of ornamental forms which seem to be incongruous—that is, incapable of having grown together; and the use of too much or too little ornament.

The decorator can escape the first sin, as he can escape so many other sins against good decoration, by the mere exercise of care and common sense. He can escape the second sin only through a sound study of ornament, which will enable him to avoid incongruities both in the character of ornament and in degrees of conventionalization, which is a matter no less important.

The distribution of ornament and the relation of ornamented to plain surfaces is a matter of very great importance in decoration, both in the treatment of the room regarded as a whole and in the design of individual units. The mind finds a room with too much ornament distracting and wearisome, and one with too little ornament tedious and dull. That is, it wants, here as everywhere, to be aware of the presence of unity in diversity. Beauty and comfort are possible only where there is neither too little nor too much. The student will sometimes find in books on interior decoration definite formulas for the distribution of ornament; as, for example, the statement that figured rugs demand plain walls and hangings, figured walls plain rugs and hangings, and figured hangings plain rugs and walls. Such formulas are of no value whatever, since they may be, and in fact are continually disregarded with the happiest results.

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Probably no formula can be adduced to cover the distribution of ornament more definite than the one which was included in the chapter on proportion. We know that we must have a judicious balance between plain and ornamented surfaces; but we know also that within the maximum and minimum limits imposed by this esthetic requirement we can in practice vary in a marked degree the relative emphasis placed upon plain or ornamented surfaces in the decoration of a given room. Relative emphasis upon plain as opposed to ornamented surfaces makes for fineness and delicacy of effect, while relative emphasis upon ornamented as opposed to plain surfaces makes for richness and breadth of effect. Over-emphasis upon plainness results in thin, poor and weak rooms. Over-emphasis upon ornament results in over-complexity and that confusion which is invariably fatal to beauty.

## CHAPTER XV

### EXCELLENCE IN DESIGN

**W**E have seen that in the perfectly furnished room the parts are so congruous in proportion and so harmonious in line and coloring that the room appears to be not a creation but a growth. Nevertheless it is purely a creation, made up of many separate units—of floor and wall coverings, furniture, hangings, and decorative accessories of many kinds. While the decorator does not in ordinary practice design these units, he must choose and combine them; and since the organic excellence of the finished room will be strictly conditioned by the designs of the individual units, he must be able to recognize excellence or the lack of it in the designs of these units.

Excellence in design is not a simple quality, but rather a complex made up of many qualities, both esthetic and practical. Nor is it in practice a fixed and unchanging quality; for good decoration, as we have seen, is largely a matter of correct relationships, and a given design may be admirable in one situation and quite the opposite in another. The fact is that before a design can be accepted as excellent it must pass four tests: first, it must fit its particular purpose or func-

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tion; second, it must be adapted to the material in which it is expressed; third, it must fit its decorative environment; and finally, apart from all considerations of fitness, it must be intrinsically good-looking.

Fitness to purpose is the first test of excellence in the design of any decorative unit. Throughout all the appointments of a house every background surface and every object of use or ornament must be adopted in size, shape, color, pattern and material to the purpose it is destined to serve. Important as is this test of fitness, neither technical training in design nor even a highly cultivated taste is required for its application, but only common sense and an open mind.

It is a matter of common sense, for example, that draperies, in addition to the purely artistic value of their texture, coloring and pattern, ought to subdue or control the lighting of a room, to ensure a sense of privacy or intimacy to its occupants, and to soften and yet empha-



FIGURE 50.—Louis XVI draperies which violate the requirements of fitness to function in design.

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size the structural lines of its openings. Draperies that perform none of these useful offices and are by nature incapable of performing any of them are bad in design, whether they appear as cheap and tawdry rope or leather portières, or as such elaborate and costly examples as the Louis XVI hangings illustrated in Figure 50. Common sense will likewise reject the writing desk too small or unstable for comfortable use; the lamp with no real power of illumination; the easily-soiled and perishable pillow; the lounging chair too shallow in the seat or low in the back or high in the arms to sustain in comfort the particular individual for whose use it is primarily intended; and the multitude of similar violations of this primary requirement of sound taste.

Care and common sense will also enable us to apply the second test of fitness. "Never forget the material you are working with, and try always to make it do what it can do best," cautioned William Morris. Manifestly sensible as is this advice, it has been and is to-day widely ignored, with a marked resulting loss in the beauty or fitness of many decorative materials. Thus the base of a floor lamp may safely be made of wood and carved into an elaborate Renaissance design; but the same design, cast in compo, is almost certain to be chipped and broken within a short period of time. Delicately-colored naturalistic flowers are unpleasant either in woolen floor coverings or in wrought iron table bases; yet we find them in both situations. Many of the designs found in self-toned damasks are

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fitting and effective when reproduced in inexpensive papers; but the involved and multi-colored patterns of good brocades are dauby and ineffective when copied, as they frequently are, in wall papers. Even so great an artist as Chippendale frequently carved the backs of his chairs into delicate interlacing ribbon forms wholly unsuitable to a rendering in wood.

What the decorator must be most carefully on guard against, however, is the effect of pretentiousness and tawdriness that results from the use of things made from inexpensive materials and by cheap processes in imitation of costly things. When the design of a Savonnerie or Persian rug costing one hundred dollars a square yard is imitated in a machine axminster fabric costing five dollars a square yard no part of the excellence of the original can be made to appear in the copy, in spite of the fact that the axminster designer has practically an unlimited palette at his command; while the real excellence of the axminster fabric itself, which would be perfectly apparent in a simple design, is also lost. Unhappily there is a constant demand from the purchasing public for things which are at once cheap and showy, and the manufacturer is forced—sometimes much against his will—to bring out in cheap materials and by purely mechanical processes crude copies of designs by nature restricted to costly materials and slow and expensive hand processes. Thus our shops and our homes are filled with dreary imitations of *fillet* or *point de Venise* lace curtains, furniture machine-carved and ornamented with jigsaw or compo appliqué, and printed velveteen upholstery fab-

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rics that look as little like the sumptuous old velvets from which their designs were taken as a chromo looks like a Turner canvas.

It is unnecessary to discuss at length the third test of excellence in design, since the whole course of our study has tended to emphasize its importance. Because unity and beauty in decoration largely depend upon sound proportion and upon recurring forms and colors the designs of single objects to be used in a given room must harmonize, both in structural lines and ornamental details, with the predominant lines and forms of the room regarded as a unit; except, as noted in earlier chapters, where differences are introduced for the sake of contrast. Failure to appreciate the fundamental importance of this requirement is responsible for much bad decoration. There are for example many persons who, seeing the manifest beauty of some Oriental rugs and their incomparable fitness and excellence in certain situations, act upon the assumption that all Oriental rugs are beautiful and excellent in any situation; just as there are other people who, seeing the manifest ugliness of some Oriental rugs and their incomparable unfitness in certain situations, act upon the assumption that all Oriental rugs are unfitting in any situation. Of course, some of these rugs are intrinsically beautiful and some are not; but the point to be pressed here is that no rug, whatever its intrinsic merits, can be regarded as excellent in a particular room unless it is harmonious with the lines and coloring dominant in the room, and accordingly capable of concurring in the proper expression of the decorative mo-

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tive. Thus the soft curves and delicate coloring of most Kashan and Kermanshah rugs make these weaves admirable for use in a drawing room filled with light, graceful furniture in which curves are more or less strongly emphasized, as in the styles of Hepplewhite or Louis XVI, and quite unfit for use in a living room furnished with Craftsman furniture, or with the heavy straight-lined types of the Renaissance; while the straighter lines, more angular forms, and darker and purer colors of a Bijar rug make it excellent in the latter situation and quite unfitting in the former.

The fourth test of excellence in a design is the test of beauty. Beauty in a rug, a table or a textile is like beauty in the room as a unit in that it is beyond definition and beyond convincing analysis. It is, however, dependent upon unity in diversity, graceful and rhythmic line, good proportion, symmetry, and pleasing color. There is, of course, this obvious distinction: that the rug or the table or the velvet are but parts of the whole treatment, and as such may properly lack elements of beauty which are supplied by other parts of the whole. Thus a plain rug, like a plain paper or a plain taffeta, though it lack variety both in pattern and coloring, may be beautiful in a room where its plainness is required to set off the rich diversity of other decorative elements.

The best way to learn to recognize beauty in a design is to observe and compare designs, of whatever sort and wherever they are to be seen; whether in the home, the shop or the museum. The next best way, and a way open to all of us, whatever our situation, is



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to study illustrations of designs in books and magazines. It makes no difference that many of the designs we see are bad, so long as we see large numbers of examples, and study them carefully and impartially, for the eye and the mind quickly acquire through practice and discipline the power to discriminate between bad and good. In fact we learn to know the good more quickly through comparison with the bad.

It is important to note that the student will profit most largely from the observation and study of individual designs, rather than from groups made up of many diverse units. When the layman looks at a furnished room, whether in a book or out of it, he sees too much and grasps too little. Individual excellence or the lack of it is obscured or lost in the effect of the whole. The study of complete rooms is of course an important and necessary part of the training of the decorator—the study of them, not mere hurried glances at them, which are of slight value; but this study must be supplemented by the study of individual units and of related groups. The value of a systematic study of period decoration lies in considerable part in the fact that it presents for comparison these groups of related units, points out their resemblances and their differences, and makes it easy for the student to detect and fix in mind the sources of their excellence.

Another very important source of help toward acquiring the power to judge soundly of excellence in design is a study of the principles of design. This does not mean that the decorator must become a prac-



*Courtesy of Gill & Reigate Ltd., London.*

PLATE XV.—This richly carved 17th century chair has a raked or inclined back with perpendicular back legs. Note that when the back of a chair is inclined the back legs must, to satisfy the demand of the mind for an appearance of stability, be inclined backward reciprocally, as in Figure 10.

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tical designer. It means only that his perceptions will be sharpened and his taste notably improved by a real familiarity with the theory of design. Many helpful studies in this subject will be found in the works of Walter Crane and Lewis F. Day, in works on the principles of design by Rhead, by Batchelder and by Jackson, and particularly in *La composition décorative* by Mayeux, a book published in English as *The Manual of Decorative Composition*. This work, particularly the first or theoretical part, is invaluable.

Every design, whatever its character, consists essentially of a plan and details, and it cannot be a good design unless the details are kept clearly subordinate to the plan and help in its perfect realization. We have seen this to be emphatically true of the design of a room as a unit, and it is equally true of the design of a rug or a chair. The Barocco chair shown in Figure 49 is an extreme example in furniture design of this defect. In this chair the mass of over-luxuriant ornamental detail obscures the structural lines of the piece and thus prevents the possibility of beauty, to say nothing of fitness, in the whole. Similar examples of the loss of beauty through subordination of plan to detail are afforded by the use of wall papers of large, sprawling or over-pronounced design in situations where the pattern strikes the openings and corners of the room in such irregular ways as to make the whole effect of the walls confusing and meaningless. This defect is frequently found in rooms where fine and costly hand-blocked landscape papers are used.

The walls, as the principal background surface, are

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so important as to condition definitely the success of the room, and their design must accordingly be most carefully studied. A discussion of the methods of treating walls in modern decorative practice does not lie within the scope of this study. The student will, however, find plenty of material and innumerable illustrations of successful walls in every library. It must be remembered that paneled walls, whether done in natural woods or in canvas and paint, are absolutely dependent upon excellence in proportion, and that they must always be designed by a competent architectural designer. Paneling in natural woods gives to the walls of a room a marked effect of strength and stability—qualities which are, of course, desirable in large rooms of a serious character, but undesirable in large rooms of a lighter and gayer character, and in small rooms of any character. Painted walls, on which plaster or wooden moldings are used with canvas-covered backgrounds, can be used in rooms of any size, though it is clear that the note of restraint and formality with which they always invest a room will become more insistent as the rooms are increasingly smaller.

Concerning excellence in the design of wall papers and cloth fabrics, we have noted in earlier chapters that, in general, size of pattern, or effect of texture, or both, will increase directly with the size and structural emphasis of the room; that the amount of pattern and the number of colors in a wall paper must be decreased as the quantity and number in the other surfaces of the room are increased; and that while the

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ornamental detail in a paper may be drawn from nature, it must, except in the case of hand-blackened landscape papers, be highly conventionalized.

While a paper intended to serve as a background for pictures or for other objects of marked decorative value must have a pleasing texture, it will normally be either plain or covered with an inconspicuous self-toned pattern. Water colors, pastels and etchings used in a small room will look best against plain walls. Large heavily-framed pictures in a large room will look better on a coarse or open texture, or, where the proportions of the room demand it, against a medium-sized and symmetrical pattern in a self-toned paper. In a room without pictures or other wall ornament the wall paper may, of course, reveal a more pronounced pattern and richer coloring; but even here it is to be remembered that in the background surfaces of any room to be used regularly and for long periods of time cultivated people can endure but a very moderate degree of stimulation. The gorgeous papers that one sees in the shops or reads of in the books can be hung successfully only in rooms used infrequently or for short periods; and even then they can be employed safely only by skillful decorators. In the hands of beginners the use of such papers is practically certain to result in unpleasant and inartistic rooms.

All wall papers, except the hand-blocked scenic papers so much used at the end of the eighteenth century, have of necessity a repeating pattern. Unless the repeat is wholly concealed, as in the case of shaded or blended papers, it should be clearly revealed and even

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emphasized. For this reason diaper patterns are likely to be far more agreeable when hung than detached figures in which the ornament, though constantly repeated, is set off by plain spaces. Such papers have a spotty effect, and an insistence of appeal that catches the eye and wearies the mind. It is to be noted that fairly small patterns, and ornament either purely geometrical in character or else very highly conventionalized, are best suited to repeating pattern design, whether in wall papers or carpets, and that in the degree that patterns are very large, markedly naturalistic in rendering, or of a strikingly exotic character—as in the *Chinoiserie*s so much the rage in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and so much copied in recent years—they become less well adapted to the requirements of repeating ornament and less pleasing when so used.

The number and variety of colors that can be effectively used in the design of a paper varies inversely with the size of the pattern. In small patterns the colors appear in such minute areas, and so closely juxtaposed, that the eye feels no sense of confusion. In large figures, on the other hand, the number of colors must be narrowly restricted, and the best effects are almost invariably produced in patterns limited to two or three tones of a single hue.

The esthetic function of the floor coverings is, in general, to provide a low-toned and restful base for the decorative treatment. It is a mistake to assume that the ideal floor covering is always the plain rug or carpet. Plain carpets affect the mind precisely as

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do other plain surfaces, and they are desirable only when they concur in the proper expression of the emotional character or motive of the room as a unit. The ideal floor covering, abstractly considered, is rather the one which is both low in tone and broken in hue, since such carpets yield the effect of stability essential in the base of the room, and at the same time make it possible to give a subtle interest to the color treatment by echoing in small and broken masses on the floor the larger masses of more brilliant colors appearing in the decorative objects placed nearer eye-height. On the other hand, the carpet must not in the modern room make an over-insistent demand for attention. In Persia and Turkey there are no pictures and but little furniture, and the rugs constitute the chief decoration of the room. With us the finest rug is but one part of a much greater whole, and the decorator must be careful to keep his floor covering, like every other individual element, carefully subordinated to the general scheme.

In the design of floor coverings the essential conditions are flat surface and uniformity of appearance as seen from any point of view. The first requirement definitely bars all effects of perspective or relief, which cause one or more elements of the design to seem to be in a higher plane than the others. Such effects appear when bright flowers or other ornamental motives are related to a darker ground by shading, as well as in shaded self-toned ornament. Flatness of surface is characteristic of all good Oriental rugs, and where rich color effects are demanded in the design of a



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domestic rug or carpet this essential flatness can be best ensured by using colors in the Oriental manner; that is, by defining flat masses of color and relieving forms by means of narrow outlines of other colors, and by eliminating all effects of shading.

Violations of the second requirement are common, even among the finest domestic carpets and rugs. They result chiefly from the practice of copying successful wall paper and drapery patterns in floor coverings, and arise from failure to distinguish between the artistic requirements of vertical and horizontal surfaces. Every wall surface has a bottom and a top, and vase, vine, flower and tree designs are, if properly conventionalized, perfectly appropriate for wall work because no one can see them from the top. Floor coverings, on the contrary, must be seen from every point in the room, and a pattern having a pronounced direction will necessarily appear to be upside down when seen from one end of the room.

In the past fifteen years American manufacturers of floor coverings have made notable progress, both technically and in the character of their designs. They have not merely kept up with improving general taste; the best of them have kept well ahead of it. It is safe to say that nowhere in the world is there to be found such an extraordinary range of good fabrics in beautiful and suitable designs as in our own shops. Naturally the manufacturers have had to meet the demand for extreme and showy novelties, and even among the finest fabrics many hopelessly ugly

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and unfitting designs will be met with. However, no one is compelled to buy these things, and no one can blame either the manufacturer or the better class of dealers if his rooms are marred by commonplace and unlovely rugs.

Where the hangings are intended to have a structural value, and to give apparent support to the walls and ceiling, they must have ample fullness of material and be run to the floor. Ordinarily they will also have a lambrequin or valance. Full-length hangings will reveal the maximum effect of support when they are permitted just to touch the floor or are, for the sake of cleanliness, kept an inch or less above it. The old English practice, now followed to a considerable extent in America, of permitting the hangings to rest upon the floor in deep folds, increases their richness, but diminishes their structural value. Many rooms are marred structurally by the use of insufficient material in the hangings. It is the depth and fullness of their folds that gives to draperies their richness and strength, and always in large rooms, or in any rooms where an effect of richness and dignity is aimed at, there must be ample material. This principle has always been observed in good decoration, as well as in the art of costume design. "Quantity, or fullness of dress," observed Hogarth in the *Analysis of Beauty*, "has ever been a darling principle. . . . The robes of state are always made large and full, because they give a grandeur of appearance suitable to the offices of greatest distinction. . . . The grandeur of the Eastern

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dress, which so far surpasses the European, depends as much on quantity as on costliness. In a word, it is quantity which adds greatness to grace."

While a lambrequin, which seems to rest upon the side hangings as an architrave rests upon its sup-

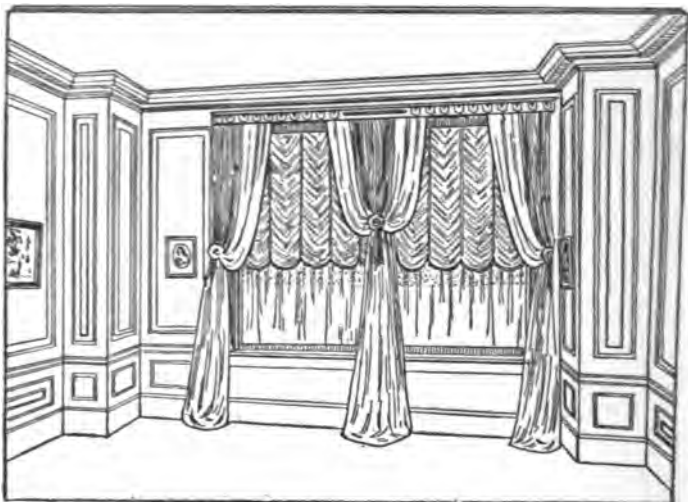


FIGURE 51.—The proportions of many windows make the use of hangings with lambrequin or valance unfitting. Frequently a cornice molding of some kind, suitably embellished and colored, is used without valance.

porting columns, is in general best adapted to the requirements of structural emphasis, this member may in the case of low windows or other architectural peculiarities be omitted, and the hangings can fall directly from behind a well-designed cornice board, as shown in Figure 51. It must be noted that even when

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a lambrequin is used it should be capped and finished by a cornice of some kind, however narrow. The practice—very common in drapery workrooms—of using lambrequins without this upper member violates the requirements of architectural composition and results in the creation of unconvincing and ugly windows.

It is to be noted that the words lambrequin and valance are used in this volume in their common rather than their correct sense, the latter to designate a lambrequin which is shirred, pleated, or otherwise made up to fall softly and without stiffness; the former to designate a lambrequin mounted on buckram and therefore possessing a flat surface and a sharply-defined outline.

Owing to the disposition of the mind to look to the top for the meaning of things, the valance, lambrequin and cornice board are sure to be conspicuous, and they must therefore be carefully designed. The folds of a valance yield an effect of softness and a play of light and shade that makes almost any texture pleasing and renders it unnecessary to pay much attention to the pattern, though in pleated valances care must be taken to see that a sharply-marked part of the pattern does not appear more conspicuously on one fold than on another. The bottom line of a valance should be defined by a piping, gimp, band or fringe, and usually a French-pleated valance is made more convincing by knotting a heavy cord, made to match the cloth or to contrast with it in color, along the valance at the points where the pleats are caught up.

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A lambrequin lacks the effects of soft folds, and it must accordingly be made of a pleasing texture and set off by good trimmings. No inanity of decoration is uglier or more useless from every point of view than an ill-designed lambrequin, and none is more common. By its nature a lambrequin is structural in character and formal in effect, and there is no excuse for using one in a low-ceilinged and informal room. Lambrequins can be effectively made of figured fabrics only when the pattern is symmetrical, and so spaced that it can be followed roughly in shaping the bottom line of the lambrequin. Where the patterns of materials to be used for the side hangings do not conform to these requirements it is in general best to make the lambrequin of a plain material which matches the ground color of the side hangings; as when a plain blue silk velvet or satin, embroidered in dull gold, is used with hangings of blue and gold damask. In the case of figured hangings having a light ground, like cream or pale gray, the lambrequin is usually chosen to match one of the darker and richer colors appearing in the pattern; if possible one which also appears in the carpet or rug.

The bottom line of a valance, and particularly of a lambrequin, is conspicuous in any room, and it must invariably be designed by a competent designer. Many rooms are seriously marred by weak or commonplace curves, by angles too acute, or by the absence of a dominant element in the profiles of the draperies. The depth of valance or lambrequin, since these elements possess a structural character, must be proportioned

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to the length of the side hangings. Valances that are too short appear to be trivial and inadequate; those too long appear heavy, awkward and lowering. While in practice the proportions will be altered slightly according to the architectural proportions and the motive of the room, the ratio will vary from 1:6 to 1:8, with the latter more satisfactory than the former for rooms of the lighter and more livable type.

Where undercurtains are used their proper function is to soften the glare of the light, to ensure privacy, and to give to the occupants of a room the sense of being indoors. Normally undercurtains have no structural value and very little decorative value other than that of soft neutral color and pleasing texture. Curtains must never be allowed to complicate the background surfaces or destroy the unity of a room, or to exalt themselves as ornament at the expense of what the windows reveal through the effect of pattern too elaborate or too pronounced. Whether pattern is to be used at all in the curtains of a given room, and if so how much and of what character, are questions to be answered only after a study of the individual room.

It is obvious that curtains must be more pronounced in pattern or more heavy in texture, or both, as the size and structural emphasis of the room are increased; that highly figured hangings require relatively plain curtains; and that the more ornament there is in the other surfaces of the room, and particularly in its wall surfaces, the less there should be in its window curtains.

Nothing more will be said here concerning excellence

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in the design of furniture, since the subject is too broad to be treated within the limits imposed by the character of this study. In fact, both the fitness and the beauty of a piece of furniture are so largely dependent upon beauty of line and perfect proportions that few generalizations can be made on the subject. Finely and fitly designed furniture may be seen in the better shops of every city of importance, while illustrations of finely designed furniture are available in a multitude of books and magazines, and the student will make more rapid progress toward the acquisition of a sound taste by observation of examples than by the study of critical analyses.

## CHAPTER XVI

### PERIOD DECORATION

**I**T will be apparent from the preceding chapters that the study of period decoration does not lie within the scope of this essay, which is concerned neither with individual nor epochal expression in interior decoration, but rather with the basic principles that underlie and condition all expression in that art.

Period decoration is in theory and in practice an attempt to employ in the decoration of present-day homes the ideals, forms and materials of an earlier day. We have, however, seen that interior decoration is properly an art having the distinctly practical aim of making homes beautiful and comfortable to live in; that to be beautiful a given house must conform to esthetic laws derived from the constitution of the mind itself, and therefore lying far below all that is changing and ephemeral; while to be comfortable it must satisfy a complex of special needs, tastes and circumstances which of necessity varies with each household, and is in fact as unique as the complex of lines in a finger-print. Since one of the factors in every decorative problem is in the nature of things unique, it fol-



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lows that every satisfactory solution of such a problem must also be unique, and that accordingly a man cannot live in his neighbor's house, or his father's or his grandfather's house, and find it in any accurate sense both beautiful and comfortable. How, therefore, can he expect to live in the homes of one or two or three hundred years ago?

Of course, no one really does. The most enthusiastic exponent of period decoration professes merely to adapt the historic styles to present-day needs, though it is to be noted that in practice he seeks to re-create the ideals of the past, and to reproduce its rooms with meticulous fidelity to detail. The ideal of a return to the past is however foolish and quite unrealizable. We cannot return to the past, either in art or in life, precisely because it is the past. The hour or the age that has been borne backward by the stream of time is gone, with its own ideals and aspirations, its proper modes of thought and action. It can never be called back or re-created or re-lived. Hence period decoration, in the degree that it is fully and accurately realized, is mere pose, theatrical and unreal. It is in fact only in the degree that an historic style can be so modified in practice as to adapt it to the requirements of comfortable modern life that it is properly of interest to the decorator of to-day. In the degree that it is too archaic, too ponderous, too sumptuous or too exotic for present-day homes it is properly of academic interest only, and the attempt to use it in practice in spite of its manifest unfitness can result only in actual ugliness and discomfort, however great may be the

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effect of magnificence or the merely pictorial value of the rooms.

Much of undoubted value can be learned through the systematic study of period decoration that can be learned in no other way, but the time required for such a study is prohibitive for most laymen, while the mass of descriptive and illustrative material essential to it has never been—and cannot be—condensed into a single volume. The student who has the time and energy to go ahead with the serious study of the subject will find an admirable literature in English and French, while several manuals are available which treat different phases of it superficially but helpfully for the general reader.

In all ages man has tried as best he could to make his home satisfy his needs and aspirations. If we take a quick glance backward over such of his attempts as have been made in historical times we will see that from time to time, at a given period and among a given people, architects, builders, designers and craftsmen of all sorts get into the habit of doing things in a certain way—of emphasizing certain types of line, form, proportions, ornamental motives and colorings. These ways will always be seen to have grown more or less spontaneously out of the ideals and customs of the past, and to be adjusted more or less perfectly to the ideals and customs of the particular period. And because these ways of doing things conform to the prevailing social, economic and political conditions, and express the prevailing social and ethical ideals, they become general, then dominant, and

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thus crystallize into what we call a style. Among other peoples with different ideals and needs other styles become dominant. Everywhere styles wax and wane and are succeeded by new styles which more adequately express new ideals or meet changed conditions. Infrequently what we call the period styles have expressed the needs and tastes of a whole people: usually those of the court and the aristocracy only. Always they are in a state of flux, because they are merely the reflection in one medium—as literature is in another medium, and historic costume in a third—of life, which is itself always in a state of flux. Thus each style emerges slowly from an earlier one, climbs to the meridian of its purest expression, declines, degenerates and decays, following the universal law of life.

The civilizations of the ancient world made no important contributions toward the development of the modern house. Neither did the civilization of medieval Europe, with its feudal organization of society and its vast and gloomy castles. It was not until the Renaissance that the modern house and modern methods of furnishing it began to emerge. From the middle of the fifteenth century until the end of the eighteenth—that is, from the Renaissance to the French revolution, when the old régime passed, and aristocracy began to yield place to modern industrial democracy—the tides of life flowed swiftly in Europe, and, as we would expect, frequent and relatively rapid changes took place in the manner of building and furnishing houses.

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While the Renaissance began in Italy, it quickly spread to the north and west. In architecture and decoration the Italian ideas, forms and practice soon reached France, and, half a century later, we find them in England, where they displaced or fused with the Gothic ideals and practice. They became dominant in France with the accession of François I in 1515, and in England with the accession of Elizabeth in 1558.

The French styles developed smoothly and logically, that of François I being followed by those of Henri II, Louis XIII, Louis XIV, Louis XV and Louis XVI. After the revolution the Directoire and the Empire styles were created, from foreign elements chiefly classical, by the fiat of Napoleon. In England, owing to frequent changes of dynasty, and to the constant interfusion of foreign ideas through political and commercial causes, the styles changed rapidly, beginning with the Elizabethan, followed by the Jacobean, the styles of Charles the First, the Commonwealth, Charles the Second, William and Mary, Queen Anne, and the Early Georgian, and by the late eighteenth century Adam style and the individual furniture styles of Chippendale, Hepplewhite and Sheraton, and finally terminating in the nineteenth century in the so-called Victorian style.

During the nineteenth century decoration, like architecture, fell into a period of decline. Taste became debased, craftsmanship inferior, and in America, as in Europe, builders, manufacturers and housefurnishers alike gave over all attempt at serious original work,

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and contented themselves with poor reproductions and poorer adaptations of the work of the past.

Some forty years ago our wealthier people began to want more fitting and beautiful homes. These people had traveled in France, and they turned naturally to France for models, so that there was a period of almost two decades in which French ideas and practice were dominant in the furnishings of important American houses. Later the English styles began to be copied, and presently, almost over night, we had among us the phenomenon of period decoration. The thing went farther than mere copying. Whole rooms—woodwork, ceiling, fireplace, furniture; everything except the pregnant associations and the spiritual quality that made them significant and beautiful—were torn out of old English houses and French châteaux and set up, as in the bed of Procrustes, at whatever cost of amputation or stretching, in the great American houses.

Decoration is an art that always works downward—from the king, through the aristocracy, to the *bourgeoisie*; from the rich, through the well-to-do, to the poor. Period decoration in America took the usual course. Those who could afford to buy and transport European interiors did so. Those who could not afford it bought European rugs, furniture and fabrics. Those who couldn't afford these things contented themselves with cheaper reproductions of European originals. Those who couldn't afford reproductions bought cheaper adaptations of reproductions. Once period



*Courtesy of Gill & Reigate Ltd., London.*

PLATE XVI.—The fire-screen, which is a very useful piece of furniture, can be so designed as to reveal any desired combination of outline, texture, hue, tone and texture, and is therefore valuable in creating effects of parallelism in the composition of the fire-place group.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
LIBRARY

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decoration became vogue, everybody went in for it. From that time on our progress in the reproduction of historic furnishings has been astonishing. To-day reproductions of the furniture, fabrics and decorative accessories of every historic style at all adapted to the conditions of modern life are offered in a variety nothing less than bewildering. In the fever of production no source has been left unexplored by the manufacturer or the importer. The decorator finds himself the heir of all the ages. People with money to spend can buy and place in their homes reproductions or adaptations of every decorative object or material that ever was on land or sea. In fact, many of them do.

One has only to sit down with a good manual of period decoration, a history of architecture, a history of costume and a history of society, and to compare the furniture and decorative art of a given period with its houses, its clothes, its literature, its social organization and its political, artistic and ethical ideals in order to realize that decoration, historically, has always had a purposive aim. All that was vital in the housefurnishing art of any given period was fitting; and all that is vital in it to-day is fitting. The rest is dross—interesting to the student, to be sure, like alchemy or the paintings of the cave-man—but without practical importance. It is clear that we must use historic furniture until our own designers can give us something better; if, indeed, the thing be ever possible. But it is no less clear that anything used in our homes should fit our needs, and that to copy slavishly the decorative



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practice of any historic period is quite as absurd as to copy its clothes, its schools or its methods of transportation.

It must be admitted, however, that it is one thing to recognize the absurdity of an action, and another thing to refrain from the action, provided we think it to be the correct or the smart thing to do. Just at present no one thinks it the smart thing to have the floors of his rooms strewn with rushes, though this was the usual method of treating the floors of the great houses of Tudor England, even in the time of Elizabeth. On the other hand, it is now considered by many decorators, both professional and laymen, to be the smart thing to furnish a dining room with a refectory table and benches. Thus we find otherwise sensible people sitting on long, narrow and uncomfortable benches, and crowded at either side of a very narrow table which, as used historically, had diners on one side only—the side very near a wall, which offered protection against a surprise attack or a sudden knife-thrust from behind—while the other side was kept free for the movements of the servitors.

There is one safe way, and one only, to use in the homes of to-day the rich inheritance of the past. That way is to break things down into their essentials; to look to the meanings of things, and not to the time and place of their origin. What is a Louis XV chair? Essentially, a composition of curved lines of a peculiar type. Will it look well in a given drawing room? Assuredly, if the room contains in its architectural treatment and its other furniture and ornament enough

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lines of the same characteristic type to ensure an easily perceptible degree of likeness, and if the proportions of the chair accord with those of the room; but not otherwise. What is a *cinquecento* damask? Essentially a composition of outline, color and texture, and as such it is well or ill adapted to our use in the degree that it accords with the other outlines, colors and textures dominant in the room to be decorated. The esthetic significance of a chair, a table or a cabinet depends in part upon its ornament, but chiefly upon its proportions and dominant lines; and whenever the proportions and dominant lines of chairs or tables or cabinets belonging to different historic styles are markedly similar, and their ornamental detail not so dissimilar as to destroy the necessary unity of the treatment, such pieces can be used together in a modern room quite as effectively as if they were the products of the same style.

It is easy to gain from the popular literature of period decoration an impression that the period styles reveal a peculiar fitness and beauty, and that each possesses an esoteric significance, innate and beyond rational explanation. It is true that each style does reveal a peculiar fitness—for its own period; and it is also true that the best rooms of any period reveal a peculiar beauty because they reveal those approximately perfect convergences of artistic effect in outline, proportion, coloring, texture and ornamental detail which, though necessarily characteristic of any finely decorated room, are more difficult to achieve by the purely eclectic method. As to their esoteric sig-

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nificance, the period styles possess none. Their significance depends, as the whole course of our study has served to point out, upon their elements; that is, upon outline, proportions, coloring and texture. A Renaissance chair of the first period reveals a fine effect of virility; but so does a Doric column or a Kazak rug, and for the same reasons. The effect of slender proportions and soft, yielding curves is always the same, whether we meet with them in a Louis XV sofa or in a Greuze canvas. Indeed, a sufficiently skillful designer, though he had never so much as heard of the style of Louis XV, could create a room which would have the emotional quality of that style through the employment by purely artistic means of the emotional qualities of form and color.

Where the architecture of a house permits a general adherence to a definite style, many niceties of decorative expression are possible which are not possible in rooms furnished in a more eclectic manner. On the other hand, the common practice of doing adjoining rooms, practically without reference to their architecture, in different styles which are so far apart in structure and in ornament as to be not only unsympathetic but antipathetic, so that one passes from a Henri II hall to a Georgian living room, an Italian dining room or a Louis XVI music room, is a decorative absurdity which has given a theatrical character to many American homes, robbed them alike of beauty and of comfort, and made their owners unconscious contributors to the gayety of nations. The important thing, and the only thing that is absolutely essential,

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whether one adopts a period style or not, is to see that the furniture and other decorative materials in the room fit the room in scale, concur in expressing its emotional purpose in proportion, line and coloring, and harmonize with each other and with the whole by reason of the repetition of like elements, both in physical appearance and in emotional significance.

In matters of decorative practice we are too much concerned with names, which may mean much or little. We speak of the style of Chippendale, for example, as though it were sharply defined; whereas Thomas Chippendale was a popular designer who turned his hand to anything that pleased him and promised to be profitable, and who, in addition to his most characteristic work, introduced an extreme type of rococo ornament into England at one period of his career, and created a hybrid Chinese-Chippendale style at another period. Even the great style of Louis XIV was by no means homogeneous, for during the major part of the reign of *Le Roi Soleil*, a bitter struggle for ascendancy raged between the exponents of two schools of architecture. At the present time it is particularly unwise for the layman to attach too much significance to the names borne by many of the so-called period pieces. Designers to-day use the historic styles as a thesaurus from which to draw whatever ideas happen to meet their needs or please their fancy. Much of the period furniture now in use, especially the dining room and bed room furniture, can be identified with the historic styles whose names it bears

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only through its ornamental detail, and then only with difficulty.

This is just as well, for out of it will come eventually a characteristic expression of our own needs and aspirations—a style “made and moulded of things past,” as every other style has been; but one that will be shaped to meet the peculiar requirements of a modern, cultured and democratic age. In the meantime, we who have homes to furnish will not take too seriously the claims of those who, on the one hand, urge the peculiar preciousness and virtue of the period styles, or who, on the other, decry any use of those styles. Having analyzed our own needs and fixed upon our own goal, we will approach it deliberately, taking the beautiful where we have the good fortune to find it, and concerned only with its fitness for our use. And in the degree that we acquire the power to read the meaning of the house-furnishing materials in their elements, the ability so to select and arrange them that essential likenesses result in unity and harmony, and the common sense to see to it that comfort and suitability are not lost in the search for style, we shall be able to create, each for himself, and out of the materials within our reach, the favorable home environment which is the chief end of the art of interior decoration.

## CHAPTER XVII

### CONCLUSION

**T**HE field mapped out for exploration in this volume has been covered, and the work is at an end. It is a work confessedly imperfect, and—though it aims at a certain completeness in scope and method—confessedly fragmentary. But at any rate one who has followed it to the end will have gained a clear perception of the fact that the creation of a beautiful and comfortable home environment is not a matter of magic or happy accident, but rather of rational and essentially simple processes; and it is hoped that he will have gained some knowledge of how to develop the ability to take due account of individual needs and tastes, and to proceed logically and assuredly and with the minimum of costly experiment and disappointment to express these needs and tastes artistically in the decoration of houses. In the degree that he acquires this power he becomes a decorator; without it he remains, at most, a copyist. A man's house can be a real home only in so far as it fits his needs and expresses his ideals and aspirations. "That best becomes any one," as Cicero observed, "which is most his own."

Beauty and comfort in the homes we live in—this

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is the ideal of interior decoration, the goal of all planning and contrivance and house-furnishing effort, the highest aim of all study of the art. To point out and emphasize the mutual interrelation and interdependence of these two qualities, and to set forth the principles underlying the creative processes through which they may be achieved, has been the primary aim of the study just completed. Necessarily this study has been highly analytical. We have been obliged to pick out and to consider separately elements which are actually seen only as they are combined with other elements to form wholes, and esthetic factors and forces of which we normally perceive only the resultants. This process is difficult, and at the best unsatisfactory. The art is like a two-ply web, wherein general esthetic principles are the warp threads that run from one end of the fabric to the other, giving it strength and continuity, and individual needs are the weft threads that shoot across and back, in and out, binding the warp together and giving pattern and meaning to the whole. In the process of raveling out a thread or two at a time for separate study, much of the significance of the whole mesh is lost.

Nevertheless, an analytical study is the only one that can equip the decorator to solve his own problems. The method of description and illustration is easy, and valuable suggestively. But of necessity description deals, as we have repeatedly noted, with solutions of other people's problems, not with one's own. This is not enough. The decorator must be able to use

## *Conclusion*

form and color, as the writer uses words, in the expression of any ideas. He must be able to adapt a decorative treatment to any given conditions; and the ability to do this can never be acquired through the study of examples alone, but only through a mastery of the fundamental principles of his art.

If it be objected to the general method of this study that it is too positive, too much given to formulas, and too much inclined to ignore the personal quality of decorative art and the mysterious and intangible elements of beauty, the answer is that the method was chosen deliberately. The mysterious, the personal, the intangible and vague have been too much exploited in the literature of interior decoration. What the beginner in the art needs is a starting place on the ground, not up in the air.

We must live in houses, and we must furnish them, in person or by proxy, before we can live in them. We may do this perfectly, or fairly well, or ill. With most of us it is not a question of perfection, but of relatively well or ill; not a question of the highest beauty, but of some beauty or none at all. And the difference between relatively well and ill, and between some beauty and ugliness, is a matter of communicable and easily acquired knowledge. To master the grammar of decoration and the fundamental principles of composition; to ground the mind in the elementary facts of proportion, balance, light and shade and color practice as they are here set forth, to learn enough of ornament and of design to recognize excellence and detect the lack of it—these things are easy. Yet they



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are enough to insure the power to create some measure of beauty in the home, and in the aggregate to go far toward setting up standards of artistic judgment and toward cultivating the faculty of taste upon which excellence in decoration so largely depends.

In many of the arts experiment is easy and inexpensive. The painter can correct his drawing or his coloring with no loss save that of his time. The writer can blot and rewrite his line. But the decorator must pay dearly for his mistakes. The selective processes of his art demand the use of costly materials, which cannot be changed at will. Thus ugly and unfitting decoration is too often permitted to remain, long after its ugliness and unfitness is clearly perceived and deeply deplored, simply because the cost of alterations is prohibitive.

The time to acquire wisdom is before one has need to use it; and in decoration, as in most of the arts of life, the beginning of wisdom is compact and workable knowledge, logically organized, and consisting in clearly established principles and definable general ideas. At the outset of this study taste was defined, somewhat ponderously, in the language of the dictionary. Essentially, taste is simply an unerring sense of fitness. A faculty developed by long processes of observation, analysis and comparison, it is after all chiefly a matter of knowledge. Hence success in the complex but fascinating and most useful art of furnishing houses is also chiefly a matter of knowledge. To repeat an earlier observation, vague ideals and hazy enthusiasms for beauty and comfort

## *Conclusion*

**will get us nowhere in the art. We must not only feel, but know.**

**"Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established:**

**And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches."**









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